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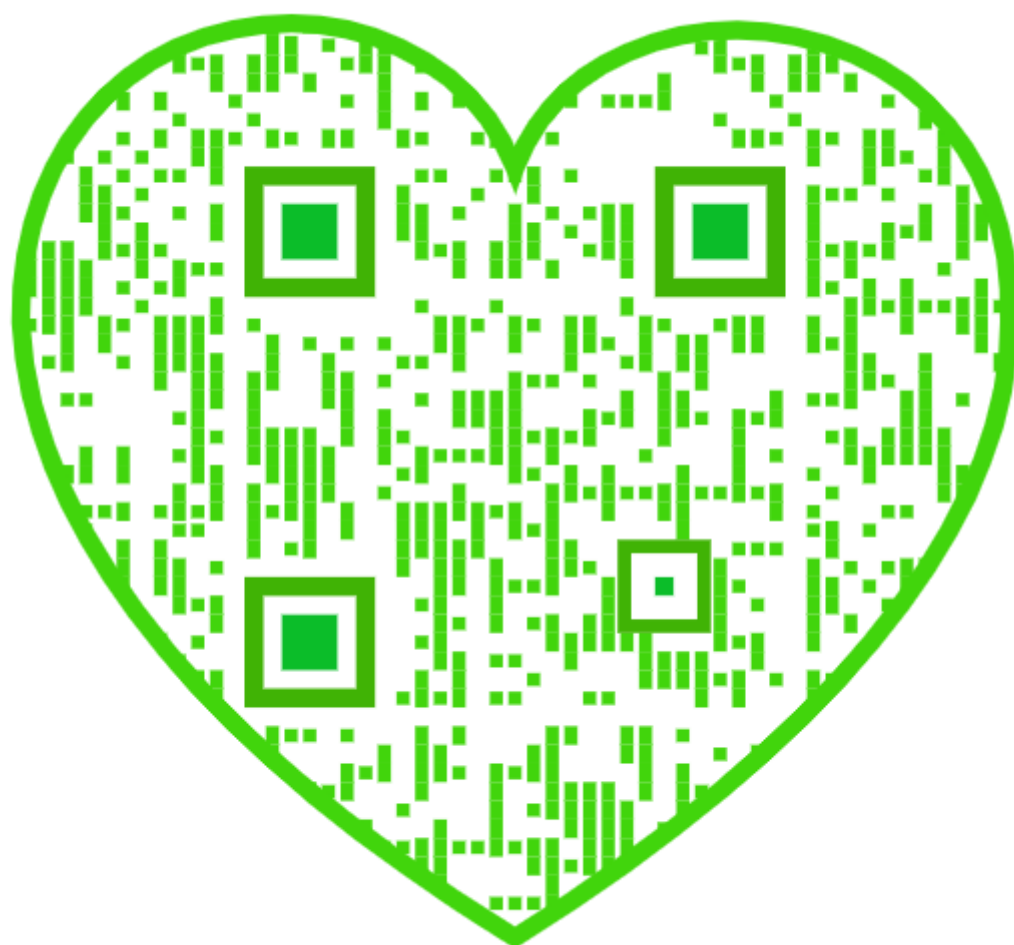
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A warm welcome

We are all in this together

As I write I am travelling on my way to Toby Buckland's fine flower festival to talk about climate change-resilient gardening and host an ASK AG clinic with our fantastic deputy editor Ruth Hayes. The train journey has been somewhat challenging with delays, and during the first segment a sweltering hot carriage with no air conditioning at all. The very kind train conductor was walking around giving passengers personal advice on how they could take other connections, which I thought was out of his way helpful and eased the frustration of the predicament for everyone on board massively.

Further on, waiting for a later connecting train, the drinks seller had sold out of water due to the heat but gave me some ice cubes to help cool down. Admittedly I had to engage him in conversation for a while and blag it a bit, but the kindness of the human spirit and togetherness is there in often the most unexpected quarters. It is humbling and offers lots of hope for the future when people step up in these little but meaningful ways.

Of course, we gardeners are well versed in the fine art of passing on plants, swapsies and gardening chit chat, but it's so nice to see these green shoots elsewhere in the wider everyday world.

This spirit of togetherness and gardening for all is central for us here at team AG, both in the magazine and at the heart of the forthcoming big National Amateur Gardening Show on the 12th and 13th July in East Sussex. We have so many exciting features and fun elements planned. As well as partnering with Kew's Wakehurst, and offering lots of craft, food and drink areas for all the family, our gardening zones will be packed full of plants and interactive experiences to teach new skills and offer new ideas, and we ourselves will be on hand with an Ask AG clinic so you can come and chat to us in person. This is all in addition to the fantastic line up of talks we have throughout the Saturday and Sunday, with Charlie Dimmock headlining.

As this show is for you, I would like to take this opportunity to ask you what else you would like to see on the days.

Please do get in touch to share ideas as your feelings and thoughts are important to us for the magazine and for the show this July and in years to come.

This issue our merry band of brilliant expert AG contributors include Ruth Hayes, Bob Flowerdew, Graham Clarke, Anne Swithinbank, Lucy Chamberlain, Michael Perry, John Negus, Mike Palmer, Stephanie Hafferty, Liz Zorab, Chris Collins, Rosie Irving, Camilla Bassett-Smith, Kim O'Brien and Toby Buckland.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Please keep writing in. I love receiving your ideas, letters, questions, musings and poems. The spirit of AG continues rejuvenated, working towards a brighter green future for us all, together.

Kim x

Kim Stoddart AG's editor-in-chief



ISSN: 0954-8513

Amateur Gardening

Kelsey Publishing Ltd.
The Granary, Downs Court, Yalding Hill,
Yalding, Maidstone, Kent, ME18 6AL

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UK Subscriptions 01959 543747
<https://shop.kelsey.co.uk/amateur-gardening-magazine>

Distribution in UK

Seymour Distribution Limited
2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT
Tel: 020 7429 4000 | www.seymour.co.uk

Distribution in Northern Ireland & Republic of Ireland

Newsprint Tel: +353 23 886 3850

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Naomi

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31 May 2025



Your NEWS FORTNIGHT

Bringing you some of the gardening news highlights

Create flower arrangements at Balgove Larder in Scotland



A floral event in Bedford during Great Big Green Week 2024

Communities to gather to beat climate change

Swap don't shop is the message of a growing community initiative

Gardeners are being invited to take part in this year's Great Big Green Week, a nationwide community initiative that aims to help highlight and tackle climate change.

Over 600,000 people were involved in last year's event and organisers are expecting more than 1 million this year, through in-person and online events embedded in the heart of communities, right across the country.

The umbrella theme of the events, which will run from June 7 to June 15, is Let's Swap Together for Good.

A spokesman for Great Big Green Week, which is run by The Climate Coalition, said: "You might consider events that swap skills or items, like a clothes swap, litter pick or perhaps a repair café.

"We've seen tours of local wind farms, nature restoration afternoons, mini festivals that celebrate the community and so much more. Events are hosted by teachers, bus drivers, sport clubs, artists, community groups, places of worship, libraries, builders. There is no limit on who can get involved."

They added: "Your event during Great Big Green Week will celebrate how your community is taking action to tackle climate change and protect green spaces, and encourage others to get involved too."

The first Great Big Green Week took place in September 2021 and was the largest event for climate and nature ever seen in the UK, with over 5,000 activities taking place up and down the country.

Events are being planned for the length and breadth of the UK, and for further details, to get involved and to find out what's going on in your area or plan your own event, visit www.greatbiggreenweek.com

Workshops and walled garden tours

A series of garden tours and floral workshops are running until autumn at Balgove Larder, near St Andrews, Fife.

The tours will guide visitors through the Scottish site's walled garden and the workshops will guide participants through developing their own cutting garden before picking a selection of flowers and creating their own arrangement.

Other courses focus on cultivating and arranging particular species like the dahlia; and drying and arranging seasonal flowers.

The next event, on June 14, is a tour of the walled garden followed by the chance to cut and arrange some of the flowers growing there.

For full details visit www.balgove.com.

Barnsdale retains tourism accolade

For the 20th consecutive year, Barnsdale Gardens in Rutland has retained its Quality Assured Visitor Attraction accreditation, bestowed by VisitEngland.

The garden was founded by much-loved broadcaster Geoff Hamilton.

It is now run by Geoff's son Nick, a regular contributor to *Amateur Gardening*.

The eight-acre site is made up of 38 individual gardens, run on a sustainable, peat-free basis and offering practical inspiration for gardens to try at home. There is also a nursery and an excellent restaurant.

For full details visit www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk.

Right: The Plantsman's Garden is one of 38 individual plots at Barnsdale



Steve Hamilton

Can you help with Caroline's peony passion?

A Cornish gardener with a passion for peonies has been rewarded for her perseverance after her collection of more than 100 types of the plant was awarded National Plant Collection status by plant conservation charity Plant Heritage.

Caroline Stone has spent years searching for rare types of *Paeonia lactiflora*, bred since the 1800s by Kelway's Nursery in Langport, Somerset.

Very few of these wonderful plants are now available for sale, so Caroline has been researching and searching for Kelway's remaining peonies in the UK

and Europe.

She said: "I fell in love with peonies



Above: 'Evening World' is one of the rare peonies nurtured by Caroline Stone

many years ago, but when I realised Kelway's no longer had their historic varieties available for sale, I was determined to try and collect as many as I could.

"I'm still searching for peonies bred by Kelway & Son and also pre-First World War varieties – many of which were for sale around ten years ago so could still be in someone's garden! I would love to hear from anyone who thinks they may have one of these peonies."

If you think you can help Caroline with her quest for peonies, contact her via www.glebegarden.co.uk

Ned the dog has helped Monty and his team design a dog-friendly Chelsea garden

It's a dog's life for RHS Chelsea designer Ned

Monty's dog helps design a special garden at this year's floral spectacular

It is said that every dog has his day, and for Monty Don's treasured canine friend Ned his time to shine comes next week at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

For the first time ever, a dog has had input into creating a show garden at the historic floral event - for Ned has helped Monty and his team design the RHS and BBC Radio 2 Dog Garden for the landmark floral event.

Jamie Butterworth, who helped create the plot, laid out the RHS and Radio 2 Dog Garden at his nursery, Form Plants near Woking, and Ned randomly ran through pots and plants to create the paths that will feature in the Chelsea garden.

Jamie explained: "Ned followed his nose and forged the routes that we will copy at the show."

"We had imagined that Ned would create sweeps and curves through the planting, but every time he ran off, he returned to Monty via the same route, and as such we have changed the designs accordingly."

"So Ned actually designed not just



part of the garden, but possibly the most detailed and complex aspect."

The RHS and BBC Radio 2 Dog Garden is the first RHS Chelsea garden to be designed by *Gardeners' World's* Monty Don.

Clare Matterson, RHS Director General, said: "As a nation of gardeners and dog lovers we hope this garden makes people smile. With everything going on in the world today we wanted our garden at RHS Chelsea this year to be really uplifting and bring some much needed joy to everyone."

Other areas at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show, which runs from 20 May to 24 May, will include a celebration of houseplants and their benefits, container gardens, wildlife gardens, small gardens, balcony gardens, the incredible displays in the Great Pavilion and the parade of incredible show gardens.

Full details and tickets are available from www.rhs.org.uk.



Air-Pot gets to the root of growing problems

Air-Pot containers made in Scotland are helping boost native tree numbers and biodiversity at an important Welsh project.

The initiative in Denbighshire involves harvesting seeds and growing plants at a 70-acre tree nursery using Air-Pot containers for healthy root growth.

Air-Pots are designed to prevent root circling, thus improving survival rates of potted plants before they are planted out.

Liam Blazey, chief biodiversity officer for Denbighshire Council, said: "For us, using Air-Pot containers was all about the health of the plants and the sustainability they offer. They are re-usable many times over and the resulting plants are better able to cope with challenging growing conditions due to the superior root systems they have developed."

Georgie Single from Edinburgh-based Air-Pot said: "We're delighted that Air-Pot containers have been instrumental in this innovative Welsh Government-funded project."

Ray of hope for rare dragonfly

A rare dragonfly is being brought back from the brink by a reintroduction scheme in Cumbria.

The white-faced darter, which has a chalk-white face and bright flame-coloured markings, is declining in number due to the destruction, by harvesting and climate change, of the peatland where it breeds.

But now conservationists are helping it thrive in acidic boggy pools at South Solway Mosses national nature reserve.

Mhairi MacLauchlan, RSPB Cumbria's Coastal Reserves Manager, said:

"It's incredibly rewarding to know we have created the right conditions for white-faced darter."

Right: The white-faced darter is an endangered species



Raising the next generation of gardeners

With the summer holidays looming large, this is a great time to get all the family gardening.

Thompson and Morgan have launched an online Kids Grow facility, which contains downloadable instructions for growing a wide range of crops and flowers, including potatoes, fennel, tomatoes, strawberries, sunflowers, sweet peas and marigolds.

There is also a range of Mr Men and Little Miss seeds that includes cucamelon, dwarf French beans and lilac pom-pom poppies.

David Phillips, T&M sales & marketing director, said: "We have created a wealth of resources for parents and children to dip into for school holiday inspiration and weekend activities."

"Our simple download guides give easy instruction for success with individual fruit and vegetable crops from easy cress to more challenging sowings for tomatoes and pumpkins."

For details, visit www.thompson-morgan.com/kids-grow-gardening-with-children



Above: The Kids Grow scheme aims to get little hands busy in the garden



Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with AG's gardening expert Ruth Hayes



These raspberry cuttings will be added to our raspberry patch next spring

Making the most of runaway raspberries

These easy cuttings are a great way to fill gaps in future

Nature abhors a vacuum and gardeners abhor waste, so it stands to reason that by deciding to work together we are already halfway along the process of creating a joyful and plant-packed piece of land.

Take our garden, for instance. A row of raspberry canes runs part way along one side of the fence, at the top end of which there's an empty piece of scrubby lawn with not a lot going on within it.



Above: Raspberries like to spread when they can!

Nature has obviously looked askance at this and decided to populate it with wayward raspberry shoots, which is wonderful, but unfortunately she didn't stop there.

Raspberries can spread like the wind, swiftly taking over, and young canes have started popping up in the lawn and border that lies in that area of the garden. While I adore raspberries (and snack on them as I go about gardening when they're in season).

So also not wanting any potentially new canes to go to waste, and also not wanting to wreck our lawn mower, I've grubbed up several and used them as cuttings for spare plants to fill any gaps in our raspberry patch.

It's easy to do; simply follow the stem of a rogue cane down to the soil and either pull or slice them free - I often find that giving them a gentle tug results in a portion of root coming with them which makes potting up easier.

New plants for next year

As ever when taking cuttings, always choose healthy growth and remove large leaves from down the stem and at the plant tip to reduce moisture loss.

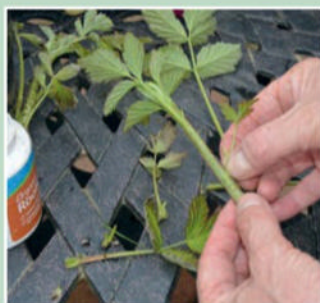
I use peat-free seed compost mixed with vermiculite to root cuttings, as the compost contains just the right amount of nutrients to help baby roots flourish without burning. The vermiculite, or any gritty substance, opens up the compost and helps boost the flow of air and water around the stems and developing rootlets.

I also used rooting powder to help with the development of strong new roots and am hoping that by the autumn, the new raspberry canes will be strong enough to move into larger pots of multipurpose compost, then I can add them to our raspberry patch next spring.

Using stray raspberry canes as cuttings



1 Tug or cut the shoot free at ground level, with some roots where possible.



2 Pinch out the largest leaves to reduce moisture loss as the cuttings grow.



3 Dip the ends in hormone rooting compound to help the new roots prosper.



4 Insert your cuttings into damp, gritty seed compost. They should soon start to grow.



Our indoor seedlings thrived in the bathroom when we went away for a week

Early summer holiday water tips

Keep plants growing happily while you take a break

We're approaching the season when an additional gardening worry is 'how will our plants cope when we go on holiday?', especially if we are away for longer than a week or have nobody to help with watering.

In April we had a week away just as our windowsill seedlings were getting ready for potting on. It was also warm and sunny and I was concerned about them, and wondering how to stop them getting sun-scorch or growing leggy.

In the end I gave them a good drink and moved them into the bathroom, some in the bath and the rest in trays on the floor.

The cool, muted light was enough to keep them growing, and the filter of the frosted glass meant that none scorched or started growing towards the window.

The only flaw in my plan presented itself when we arrived home, late at night and travel-weary, and I had to move all the seedlings before having a shower!

If you don't have a timed or solar irrigation system in place, the greenhouse



Keeping tomatoes irrigated and fed with water, liquid fertiliser and capillary matting

is another worry point during the summer, even if you have shaded the glass and it's well ventilated.

We don't have an irrigation system so what I do is insert one end of a thin length of capillary matting into the growbag compost, and the other into bowls of water and liquid tomato feed. The matting draws up the moisture and shares it with the plants.

Last summer we went away for three wonderful weeks and none of our greenhouse plants had succumbed to dehydration in our absence. In fact we ended up with a glut of tomatoes. Happy days!

■ Please let us know your top holiday watering tips so we can share them with other readers.

Sowing summer bedding

Get ready for late-year colour



Plant out your bedding seedlings in the autumn

■ I don't particularly like thinking about the winter, especially when summer is barely underway, but I do like thinking about seeds to sow for later this year.

■ Autumn and spring bedding such as pansies, violas and bellis can be sown now and then planted out this autumn.

■ They may flower towards the end of the year, or sit tight through winter and provide a ray of multicoloured sunshine next spring.

■ As always, sow in trays of dampened peat-free compost and cover with a fine layer of vermiculite or more compost before adding a lid.

■ At this time of year the seeds can go in a cold frame or mini greenhouse and when the seedlings have germinated well (don't forget to remove the tray lid when they appear) they can be potted up into small pots of modules.

■ Keep their compost damp, not soggy, and don't let them dry out.

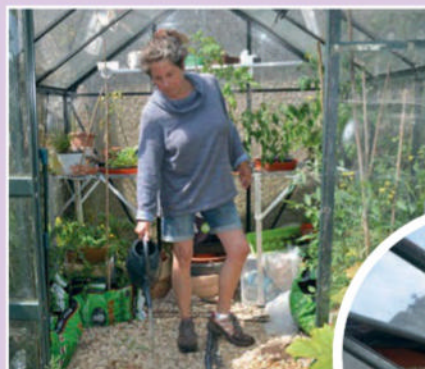
■ With healthy growth they can be planted out in the autumn, with some wool mulch around them to keep slugs at bay.

Greenhouse tips for a healthy summer

The temperature is rising in the greenhouse and although this is great news for tender veggies, we need to make sure they are snug without being scorched.

Shading the greenhouse is easy thanks to netting that can be draped over the top, and washable paint that can be coated on when hot weather arrives and then washed off when it gets cooler to allow maximum sunshine onto crops that are still ripening.

Our greenhouse has a large tayberry attached to a trellis running along the side that gets the most sun. The tayberry thrives and its greenery helps diffuse the light to slightly lower the temperature inside the greenhouse.



Above: Wetting the greenhouse floor raises humidity and lowers the temperature Inset: Good ventilation helps keep things cool



The trellis also acts as a handy buffer against the prevailing winds in winter.

On the hottest days I damp down the greenhouse floor and leave bowls of water under the shelves.

This again helps lower the temperature to manageable levels and helps deter glasshouse spider mites that dislike humidity.

Ventilation is also important, and open doors and windows have the added benefit of allowing pollinators to get to your plants - so bumper crops all round this year!

I'm cutting back a rose-scented pelargonium and will use the trimmings as cuttings
Inset: Pinching out chrysanthemum shoot tips



Pinching out and potting up

Keeping plants neat offers the chance of propagation

I think that May is my favourite month; the sap is rising and everything is growing like the clappers, to coin a phrase, and is looking lush and verdant and fresh because the heat of summer hasn't yet dulled its shine.

Herbaceous perennials in particular are shooting away, so much so in fact that they sometimes need to be kept in check to stop them outgrowing their spot or becoming weak and lanky.

One way of doing so is the 'Chelsea chop', which I talk about in the panel below. Another way is to cut back or pinch out the growing shoots. This is always worth doing because plants usually respond by throwing out a couple of shoots at the top of the pinched-out stem.

I have been going round the garden pinching out and cutting back and instead of composting the removed stems, I've used some of them as softwood cuttings and now have several bright north-facing windowsills full of them.

In the panel on the right I show you how to use the pinched-out tips of a hardy chrysanthemum as softwood cuttings.

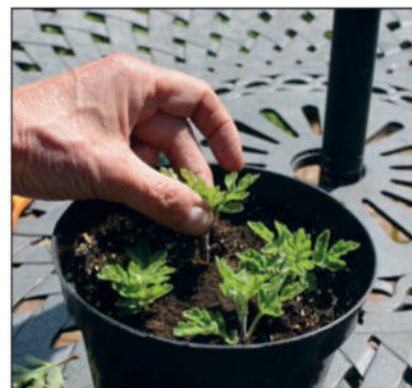
I like to take cuttings in the morning when it's still cool and the plants are full of moisture from the previous night. Ideally, pot up the cuttings as soon as you can so they don't lose water and start to deteriorate. If you need to store them for a short while before planting, pop them in a plastic bag with a few drops of water and place them in the fridge to stay fresh.

Potting up pinchings

Make new plants with the stem tips



1 When you've taken your cutting, remove the lower leaves and dip the cut end in rooting compound to promote healthy root growth.



2 Then insert your cuttings around the edge of a 10cm (4in) pot of seed compost mixed with grit or vermiculite. Seal the pot in a bag and place it somewhere light but out of direct sunlight. Remove the bag when the cuttings start to grow.

The Chelsea chop will perk up perennials

The Chelsea chop - so called because you do it around the same time as the RHS Chelsea Flower Show - is an easy way of extending and improving the flowering season of certain perennials.

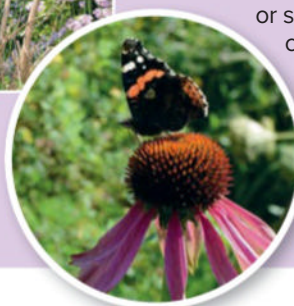
It is very simple: all you do is cut back the flowering stems by around a third and this will delay flowering by four to six weeks.

You have a choice, you can either cut back all the stems, or only a proportion of them. This results in some flowering at their natural time, while others will bloom later in the summer.

Top varieties to experiment with the Chelsea chop include aster, achillea,



Above: I give our catmint a Chelsea chop when it starts getting unruly Inset: Pollinators love echinacea flowers for their late summer nectar



echinacea, phlox and sedum.

I also chop back our catmint several times during the summer, which stops the stems flopping outwards and keeps the shrub compact and neat.

As ever when cutting back plants, always use sharp clean secateurs or shears so the stems are cleanly cut without bruising and you don't spread pests and disease via dirty blades. I generally feed the plants afterwards, with a general purpose fertiliser.

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Mark, 49, says, 'Since moving to Magnesium+ I've really noticed I recover quicker. I've more energy and I'm less tired than I used to be.'

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Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with Lucy Chamberlain, AG's fruit and veg expert

How to grow really great runner beans and bountiful basil

Lucy explains how to make the most of the next few weeks

Judging by what I see on allotment plots far and wide, runner beans are still a hugely popular edible within the grow-your-own community. And rightly so, because given the right treatment you can be picking delicious, succulent pods from July through until November – and plenty of pods, at that.

Now is prime sowing and planting out time, so what do we need to know about runner beans to maximise their cropping potential? Read on!

Varieties: Back in the 1980s my smallholder parents grew half an acre of 'White Emergo' to sell to London markets – it's still available today and considered a good traditional variety.

But breeders have now incorporated some French bean genetics into modern varieties like white-flowered 'Moonlight' and red-flowered 'Firestorm'. The results are less 'string' in the mature pods, improved pod set due to self-fertile flowers, better drought and heat resistance, and earlier flowering which subsequently increases harvest time.

All these varieties are climbers, but don't forget dwarf varieties like 'Jackpot' and 'Hestia' if room is tight. Large seeds need



Lucy explains how to grow vegetable garden staple runner beans

room to grow, so sow one per 10cm (4in) pot, and germinate at 15 to 20°C.

Roots: Gaining a good root system is key to robust plants that deliver generous pods, so prepare your soil well, and choose a good spot, planting the beans out in early June.

Being tender, beans revel in warmth (but not drought) so choose a sunny spot and add plenty of fertile, well-rotted organic matter to the bed (e.g. rotted farmyard manure), working it into a depth of at least 30cm (12in). If you are a no-dig gardener, lay a generous mulch instead.

Keep the roots sufficiently watered and be ready to irrigate a lot in the height of summer to support all that lush foliage. Talking of foliage, avoid windy sites if you can because this can tear the leaves to shreds.

Other quick tips: My dad used to swear by foliar seaweed feed to supplement soil nutrients in summer, and we used to pick pods daily to ensure they never became old on the plant (this suppresses further pod development).

I trust this now makes you feel suitably armed for a summer full of beans!

Two ways to grow basil

I grow so much basil that I keep my family self-sufficient in it year-round (it freezes well).

The conventional way to start it off is from seed because it germinates readily – just sow a cluster of two to four seeds per pot, keep at 15-18C, be careful not to overwater and then, once well emerged, pot up the whole clump - they look great in free-draining compost in terracotta pots.

Being a warm-season edible, basil isn't usually sown until late March or early

April, so by now seed sowers should be looking at beautifully lush, sizeable seedlings.

At this point I'm usually pinching out the growing tips of these seedlings to eat, but you can also place some in water to root. I use these 'water cuttings' to bulk up my African blue basil, but it works well for any form.

Take 10cm (4in) lengths, remove the lower leaves and simply place them in a jar of water, then pot up into said compost once a good root system has emerged.



Lucy explains how to bulk up basil harvests

Step by step Intercropping to boost space efficiency

Do you want to be super-efficient? Do you want to intercrop? It all sounds incredibly fancy, but essentially I'm talking about planting/sowing speedy crops in between those that are slower to bulk up and give a harvest. This method is so handy for smaller plots, or for anyone wanting to cram as much food into their garden as possible, so let's go!



1 Plant out your slow-to-mature crops that require wide spacings – I've got some calabrese (broccoli) – but celery, bulb fennel, celeriac, leeks, sweetcorn and all winter brassicas are other good examples. Give them a good watering in and remember to water and feed them well, in the usual way, to ensure they bulk up steadily.



2 Simultaneously, sow or plant out smaller, quick-to-mature edibles between the slower crops. Radish, mustard, baby turnips, broccoli raab (or rabe), texsel greens, rocket, lettuce, annual spinach (I'm using this) and baby pak choi are all good examples. Space them equally between the plants in step 1 to ensure that root competition is equal.



3 Because of the more intensive planting, keep any intercropped beds well-watered and fed, and run a hoe regularly between the crops to ensure weeds don't add to the competition. As the quick-to-grow edibles mature, harvest them, leaving the slower-to-mature crops to bulk up, watering them back in well if they experience any root disturbance.

Understanding pear problem

✿ Three things that trouble pear growers are pear midge, pear blister mite and pear rust.

Pear leaf blister mite causes pale pink marks on unfurling leaves, which turn black in summer. Pear rust causes pea-sized orange marks to appear on leaves – these two 'problems' rarely affect overall tree health and can be tolerated.

Pear midge IS a nuisance, as it can infect the tiny pear fruitlets, turning them black when they're 2.5cm (1in) or so long and they then fall off in early summer.

So, how can we limit its damage? Now, before fruitlets fall, remove any that are turning black and dispose of them in your rubbish bin. Lay a plastic sheet under affected trees from now until late June to stop any midges pupating in the soil, then remove the sheet in July and, again, bin any debris. Simple.

Right: Lucy explains how to help avoid common pear problems such as pear rust (INSET)



Top tip



Your GARDENING FORTNIGHT

with Lucy Chamberlain, AG's fruit and veg expert

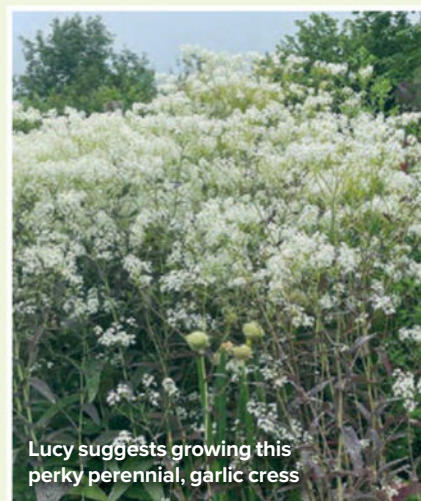
Why not try...?

Garlic cress

✿ I have my gardening friend and AG contributor Barbara Segall to thank for the reminder that this plant is truly delicious – I've written about it before, but when something tastes good, yields well and is trouble-free, surely that's a reason to re-visit it?

Perennial vegetables are enjoying a renaissance in their popularity, thanks to their incorporation into permaculture plantings and low-maintenance plots. Garlic cress (*Peltaria alliacea*) can be bought as plants or seeds, and is one of those plants that can, once established, be left to fend for itself.

Its main season of harvest is actually autumn, winter and early spring when the lush deep green leaves make a tangy salad ingredient and excellent pesto base. But mature plants can be sheared down to the ground at any time to encourage a flush of fresh, succulent new foliage. That said, you'd delay flowering and the pretty white blooms are edible too, so make your choice.



Lucy suggests growing this perky perennial, garlic cress

Image © www.incrediblevegetables.co.uk

5 quick jobs...



1 Have you grown patio or trailing tomatoes? I find these crop sooner than traditional cordon types, so pot transplants up into big tubs and keep them in your greenhouse, or a warm, sunny, sheltered spot outside. They'll revel in the warmth, and will begin ripening from mid-June. Bring on the mozzarella and olive oil!



2 Baby roots are succulent, sweet and tender, so if you planted out beetroot or turnips in early April they could be ready to pull by now.

Carrots can be a bit slower to mature but who knows, you may also find they're ready, too. All will taste incredible.



3 As temperatures rise, our window for sowing cool-season crops starts to close. But if you hanker for peas, broad beans or carrots, sow drills in shadier spots now. Pests sadly revel in warmth, too, so if you know that you're troubled by carrot fly, blackfly on broad beans or pea moth, simply cover over sowings with fine insect-proof mesh.



4 Is your greenhouse or polytunnel bathing in sunlight? As well as opening vents, doors and windows to regulate the temperature inside, 'damp down' the floors and walls to create a beautifully humid environment. Your crops will love it and the damper air also helps to deter troublesome pests such as red spider mite.



5 Are you a passionate fruit grower? I am! Training your trees and bushes as fans, cordons, stepovers or espaliers is so rewarding as you see these beautiful shapes build up year on year. Now is the time to continue tying in the main branches to create these symmetrical shapes, while the stems are still soft, pliable and obliging.

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Small space | Big ideas

With Nick Hamilton of Barnsdale Gardens

Nick uses pots of vibrant annuals to create a splash of colour



Easy, longer-lasting colour

Nick Hamilton from Barnsdale Gardens sings the praises of bright summer perennials and annuals

I am a life-long fan of tender perennials, primarily because they are such good value for money. I use them to boost areas in the smaller gardens at Barnsdale in different ways.

They are generally either long-flowering or later flowering; they will survive the winter if protected and are very easy to propagate.

I like the idea of putting out plants in full flower and instantly boosting the look of not just my borders but my walls and patios too. It also means that I can use varieties that flower all summer and autumn in pockets of a small garden border, leaving space to grow plants that give interest at other times of the year.

Transform a drab spot with colour

If you are a keen propagator then buy one plant and increase your stock by taking softwood cuttings. But if propagating is not your thing, then look around because you can buy these plants in plugs or smaller pots.



Above: A mix of colourful annuals and tender perennials makes a glorious show at Barnsdale

I have several walls and fences that would otherwise be bare if I didn't use wall pots to break that starkness, so by creating extra vertical growing opportunities for flowering plants you can transform a dark and uninteresting spot into a wall or fence to impress. My dad (Geoff Hamilton) also made an auricula theatre for his Cottage Garden series, which hangs on a bare section of fencing, and we fill that with potted pelargoniums once the auriculas have finished.

Create a picture-perfect patio

It only takes two or three pots filled with tender perennials and/or annuals to break up the solidity of a hardstanding patio

surface and enhance it massively.

There is no need to think that you need hundreds of containers in order to get an effect, because gardening is all about having enough at every time of the year. Just a small amount of the following suggestions will lift any small space to new heights.

Plants for wall pots

I like to use a mix of these tender perennials.

Tender geraniums (*Pelargonium* spp), verbena (*Glandularia* spp), sanvitalia (*Melampodium montanum*) and trailing fuchsia and then top them up with the following annuals: Petunias, bacopas (*Sutera grandiflora*), million bells (*calibrachoa*s), busy lizzie (*Impatiens* spp), black-eyed susan (*Thunbergia alata*) and lobelias.

With the combination of our Helenium Tearoom wall facing south and the pots being small, the tender perennials also have excellent drought tolerance and the ability to bounce back when watering is missed! This makes them also perfect for any other container or border in a hot, sunny spot.



Extra plants for small borders or containers

I also use argyranthemums, *arctotis*, osteospermums, nemesias, gazanias, cosmos, dahlias and salvias. The tender salvias are the more woody types, such as 'Hot Lips' and 'Cherry Lips', which flower all summer, as well as the later flowering *Salvia guaranitica* types, such as 'Blue Enigma' or 'Black and Blue'. The last two are taller, so we may need to be careful when placing one in a smaller garden.

All of these tender perennials are easily propagated too, which is important as they will get woody and unattractive after three to five years. There is also a good range of hard-hitting annuals that will complement these perennials, or that can be used instead of in containers or in a border, such as larkspurs, zinnias, antirrhinums, sweet peas and dwarf sunflowers, to name but a few.

■ Barnsdale Gardens in Rutland, East Midlands, has been enthralling garden fans since 1983 when Geoff Hamilton, the much-loved presenter of BBC *Gardeners' World*, bought a Victorian farmhouse with over five acres of land. Barnsdale was

Geoff's 'great experiment' in peat-free and chemical-free growing, and his legacy continues today with his son Nick ensuring that the 38 gardens are kept to the stunning standard for which they are renowned. Visit www.barnsdalegardens.co.uk

Easy veg patch rewards

Editor and resilient-gardening expert **Kim Stoddart** outlines some of her favourite, low-maintenance crops

The sheer joy of harvesting freshly picked produce from your garden offers so many benefits. From saving money and promoting wellbeing to producing the freshest possible fruit and vegetables, home-grown edibles are exciting and nurturing in equal measure.

Yet, let's face it, some fruit and veg have a reputation for being just that bit more 'bling'. Picture-perfect heritage tomatoes from the vine, plump and fresh as you like, sweetcorn cobs, giant cucumbers, luscious, interestingly shaped salad leaves.... Yet why should they take all the glory when more traditional, less racy vegetables still have an incredibly valuable role to play? Here are some further ideas to help you on your productive and varied veg patch growing way...

Let's celebrate all carrots great and small

I grow my edibles in a free-spirited, mixed way which means that gaps between plants are filled with what I have available to maximise use of space and volume of edibles.

I just leave a good 2m (7ft) between hungry plants of the same family, such as fruits like tomatoes and cucumbers, peas/beans and brassicas. This introduces a fun, foraging element to the harvesting of food, helps with natural pest control and



Not racy but reliable crops to grow include swede, turnip, carrot and kale

© Shutterstock



Kim plants carrots in gaps around crops such as peas

will also work to protect the ground from drying out so quickly as I'm filling gaps as I go, which means less watering is required with lots of groundcover in beds.

Carrot-wise, variety is the spice of life and I grow carrots in modules (four or five per cell) and plant them out in gaps as they are. In this way the carrots' sensitive roots aren't damaged. If you love baby carrots as much as I do then a few more seeds per cell can work well and you can keep succession planting for more regular harvests.

Baby carrots never get boring, so I think of carrot thinning as getting the cream of the crop. They can be cooked whole and, if you leave a little of the top still attached, become a main event in a variety of home-cooked dishes.

I grow carrots throughout the year with the sole intention of eating many of these small ones. They are so much sweeter and creative to cook with than their full-size compadres.

Fuss-free brassica growing

I'm always for the easier option as I want my time spent gardening to be enjoyable and not high-maintenance, which is why I've ditched cabbages, broccoli, sprouts and cauliflowers that have more exacting water requirements and take up a lot of space as they sit slowly fattening over the season. These days I get my brassica fix in the following useful ways instead.

Longer-lasting leaves

Purple sprouting broccoli and kale come



Enjoy baby carrots over a long season



Classic flowers like pansy can also make a welcome and pretty addition to mixed planted beds



Romanesco is a cross between cauliflower and broccoli

out tops for me because they will dutifully keep providing; the more you pick, the more you harvest and if you leave them in the ground after their second season, they will keep producing for at least a few years. Although you can't viably save seeds from them, their lovely pretty flowers are edible and look great to decorate food, they attract pollinators to your plot and by cutting them back you can save energy in the plant to enable it to carry on producing. You can also investigate officially perennial varieties to grow such as Daubenton Kale and consider the humble but very productive and potentially longer growing Swiss chard. Just cut back leaves before they set flower to enable plants to grow on and on.

A nice cauliflower alternative

Romanesco is a cross between cauliflower and broccoli in terms of flavour, and this rather pretty Italian brassica is easier to grow. Cauliflowers require constant watering and attention all year round, whereas this hardier relative doesn't. The key threat tends to be slug and snails, so wait until seedlings are bigger before planting out and check beds first to remove any slippery suckers present.

Planting instructions

Romanesco likes alkaline soils in a



Purple sprouting broccoli can grow on if you cut back after harvesting

Jerusalem artichokes are windbreakers and wind-makers



sheltered spot, so add some lime if yours is acidic.

Sow seeds between April and June and plant out your seedlings when they are around 10cm (4in) tall, giving each plant plenty of space to grow.

They need regular watering and compost-rich soil for good leafy growth and are usually ready to harvest from September (or August if you want smaller heads).

Jerusalem artichoke

Not fashionable, but very fruitful and low-maintenance to grow. Jerusalem artichokes are great for use on the veg patch as a windbreak around the edges, though ironically, these tall attractive plants don't act as a windbreak for the human digestive system! They have the opposite effect, in fact, because they are a prebiotic food which helps feed the healthy gut bacteria, so they are incredibly good for you.

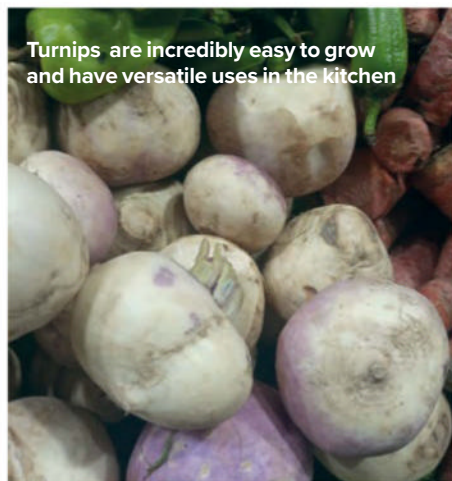
Planting instructions

- Jerusalem artichokes prefer a sunny spot, though they can tolerate light shade.
- Plant tubers in spring, around 15cm (6in) deep, 30cm (12in) apart in rich, free-draining soils.
- They can be harvested from October but will keep well in the soil until you are ready for them through to late spring.



The sunshine-yellow flowers of Jerusalem artichokes

Turnips are incredibly easy to grow and have versatile uses in the kitchen



Seeing the wider potential of turnips and swedes

Swedes and turnips are not the most glamorous of veg, there is no denying this. Yet they have a charm and an important place on the winter veg patch, which is when they arguably come into their own.

To make them more interesting, try harvesting some small, as baby roots, to open up whole new roasting opportunities which are guaranteed to excite. The leaves are also rather attractive in a range of dishes and these veg lend themselves well to fermentation techniques for longer-lasting benefits.

Baby leaves can be added to salad and left in the ground over winter, and these hardy leaves come in very useful early in the hungry gap part of the year.

Planting instructions

- Sow early-harvest turnips between March and June for a summer crop, and maincrop 'neeps' are sown in the summer and pulled in autumn.
- They like a sunny spot with rich, free-draining soil full of well-rotted organic matter.
- Hardy swedes - the full name of Swedish turnips - grow best if sown directly in spring and early summer in a shallow drill.
- Protect from pests with a cloche and thin/(eat baby roots) to allow room for some roots to fatten.

Garden wildlife watch



Bird of the month – the house sparrow

Repeatedly revealed as the number one bird seen in our gardens by the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch, we take a look at the humble sparrow

The sparrow is a bird most people can quite confidently recognise and name and we rarely think of it as a remarkable species. Yet its population is now so widespread thanks to its incredible adaptability, learning to supplement its diet with scraps from humans alongside its natural food sources. It's as likely to be seen hopping around outdoor tables at a city café, looking for fallen crumbs, as perched on a hanging feeder in a village garden or chirping from an agricultural hedgerow. And that's actually pretty remarkable!

The sparrow's reputation for being gregarious is well-earned and comes from centuries of living in such close proximity to people. Its confidence around humans makes it easier to observe, and because it doesn't defend territories in the same way some birds do, it's happy living alongside other sparrows. This makes them fun to watch, especially at this time of year when chicks are being fed and whole soap operas of drama are playing out in our gardens.

Whilst most people can spot a sparrow – can you tell a male from a female? They are actually quite different. Males are a darker chestnut brown, with a grey crown and black bib, whilst females have a much paler brown plumage as well as a pale stripe behind the eye.

Despite continuing to top our Big Garden Bird Watch most-seen table, sparrows are in quite severe decline. Research has shown that their population fell by around 70% between the late 1970s and early 2000s. Loss of habitat and food

A male and female sparrow check out a nest box - they'll happily live in close quarters with other sparrows too

Inset: Male sparrows have a lovely chestnut brown plumage



sources, linked to changes in the way we humans do things, has played a part in this.

The news coming from this year's Birdwatch had some stark headlines for another garden bird we tend to think of as really common - starlings. Fewer were counted in this year's survey than ever before. Starlings and sparrows (both house and tree types) are on our conservation red list – which means they are amongst some of our most endangered species.

Whilst we continue to investigate what's brought about such severe declines and find ways to reverse them, there are ways we know we can help, especially in our gardens. Ensuring our plots provide year-round food sources, from berry-bearing shrubs, to flower seedheads and plenty of insects, as well as giving birds space to nest and rest, all helps. Leaving grass longer – even just in some areas – and choosing not to use pesticides benefits lots of wildlife, not just birds.



© Ben Andrew RSPB Images

Female sparrows are quite light in colour – the faint stripe behind their eye is a good way of identifying them

Frequently asked questions

Q What should I do if I find a young bird on the ground?

A This time of year is breeding season, and over the next few weeks, lots of young birds will be leaving their nests. Our advice is don't pick them up unless they're in immediate danger from a predator or close to a road, in which case move them to a safer spot, within earshot of their parents still. In nearly all cases, the grounded birds hear their parents nearby and move closer. But if you are concerned about them, check out our website for more advice. www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/if-you-find-an-injured-bird



Fledglings often stand out when you spot them in the garden, as they look a little dishevelled and lost

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For more information about helping birds in your garden, visit www.rspb.org.uk



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The sweet white bells of lily of the valley give us the quintessential scent of spring and early summer

Loving the lily of the valley



Camilla Bassett-Smith explains why she is simply smitten by this dainty, scented star

There is something magical about May and the many botanical delights that morph from a hopeful shoot into a fully formed feast for the eyes.

None is more delicately delightful, both visually and aromatically, than the lily of the valley whose arching stems of white, scalloped-edged bells can colonise a corner with style and simplicity. Its botanical name, *Convallaria majalis*, points to its affinity with this month, majalis meaning 'flowering in May', and this little bloom is the subject of much adoration both here and abroad.

The French celebrate 'La Fête du



Above: This dainty bloom is perfect for cut flowers for the home

Muguet' on May 1 and hand out little posies of the flower as a symbol of good luck to welcome the spring, a tradition dating back to the 16th century. It is a tradition worth millions of euros as these little sprigs take centre stage.

Lily of the valley is also the national flower of Finland, and back on British soil, the Cornish town of Helston hosts their Furry Dance each May, celebrating

the passing of winter, with dancers accompanied by lily of the valley.

Perfect for garden and vase

It is a plant that grows wild all over Europe, despite being a little shy - getting it to 'take off' can be something of a challenge, but one worth accepting for any gardener. Beth Chatto was in agreement and commented that when the conditions



Lily of the valley is perfect for posies as well

were right, who would not plant them for their heady scent in May and June and the chance to pick handfuls for the house?

Young shoots are rather quaintly known as 'pips', which transform into pairs of large oval green leaves from which the arched flower stem appears on one side. They not only make the most fantastically fragrant cut flower for delicate posies, but their form makes them perfect for buttonholes as their long leaves wrap themselves protectively around their floral stem.

The ideal spot to place your lily of the valley is in a shady position with rich, fertile soil in cool and moist conditions. Their natural habitat is one of woodland or limestone areas, where they spread via

underground rhizomes and if happy, can in time form a dense carpet. This plant is in fact an indicator plant of ancient woodlands.

For gardeners, they have a reputation of being a little temperamental, but once settled and decided on their 'forever home' they will not leave your side. It took a good few years for me to find the right position for plants which came from my dear grandfather's garden and now, after some patience and plenty of horticulturally gloved-finger crossing, I have a swathe of the sweetest scents below our Cotswold stone wall in the dappled shade of surrounding shrubs.

Pure and simple, lily of a valley is a sensational stunner for early summer!



Lily of the valley grows wild all over Europe ↗

A Royal history



Above: Lily of the valley took centre stage at RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 2022 with Simon Lycett's display in honour of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee

There are few flowers which display quite such a royal seal of approval as the lily of the valley. No secret was made of the fact that it was the favourite flower of Queen Elizabeth II, with florist extraordinaire Simon Lycett creating a special display featuring 70 pots of the nodding fragrant white bells at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 2022 in honour of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. The flowers also appeared in our late Queen's Coronation bouquet and are believed to be grown in the Buckingham Palace grounds.

Step back further in history and The Royal Archives holds albums containing flowers preserved by Queen Victoria, including lily of the valley from a bouquet she received on her Diamond Jubilee in 1897.

The flowers also featured on a silk fan that she owned and which appeared in a birthday photograph of her in 1860. Perhaps as the flower for her birth month of May, it held extra-special resonance?

Talking of queens, the iconic band

of the same name even featured a number called *Lily of the Valley* on their third studio album *Sheer Heart Attack* in 1974, giving the plant its place in rock royalty as well!

It is no surprise that two of the world's most beautiful and revered princesses favoured this plant too, with Grace Kelly and our current Princess of Wales selecting this woodland wonder for their wedding bouquets, mirroring both brides' elegance and sophistication.

With such a pedigree, surely this regal rhizome is one to purchase for your plot?



The current Princess of Wales chose lily of the valley for her wedding bouquet



Varieties to grow

Convallaria majalis

The original and probably the best, located in certain wooded areas of England and Wales but less common in Scotland and Ireland. Up to 12 bells climb each stem up to a height of around 25cm (10in). Widely available and the one you are most likely to see in a friend's garden.

Convallaria majalis 'Géant de Fortin'

As you may surmise from its name, Fortin's Giant is a bell-laden beast of a beauty. Larger than the straight species, it flowers around a week or so later, making it useful for extending your sensationally scented season. Clearly wanting the best display possible, the French select this one for their May Day celebrations.



© Simon Lycett



The bell-like flowers of lily of the valley *Convallaria majalis*



Convallaria majalis* var. *rosea

Bearing a striking resemblance to pink-flushed white socks which I've mistakenly put in with the colour wash, this is definitely worth growing if you want to

step out of the safety zone of pure white. Romantically dancing in the dappled shade, it is believed to have been first described as far back as the 1500s.

***Convallaria majalis* 'Albostriata'**

Sometimes also seen listed as 'Variegata', yellow leaf veins give the greenery here a chance to take a fraction of people's attention away from the reliably ravishing blooms. I was given a small pot of this by a horticultural hero of mine in 2024 and I'm pleased to report that flower and foliage are both flourishing.

***Convallaria majalis* 'Prolificans'**

A double delight with a plethora of petals. This one really is a shade-loving showstopper with a perfectly perfumed performance.



The original *Convallaria majalis* is often used for posies and it's no wonder



Lovely yellow leaf veins of *Convallaria majalis* 'Albostriata'



The pink-flushed beauty of *Convallaria majalis* var. *rosea*



A pretty plethora of petals with *Convallaria majalis* 'Prolificans'



Forget-me-nots and lily of the valley look good together in posies and growing in the garden

Lily of the valley CARE TIPS

Purchase pips

Buy them when 'damp-packed' as pips in the spring, as they will not be happy if they dry out.

A winter blanket

Mulch with leaf mould in the autumn, to create a decaying duvet to keep them snug.

Divide and conquer

In order to create new plants and reinvigorate old clumps, lifting and splitting them in autumn is a recipe for rejoicing as racemes come spring.

Any soil will do

To almost coin Joseph's famous song, despite their slightly temperamental nature in finding their preferred spot, here is a bloom that has been known to base itself happily in alkaline, neutral or acid conditions.

Lily of the valley can be grown in a pot but plants need to be kept moist



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Q&A

Q Can I grow in pots?

A Yes, but if using terracotta pots, do not let them dry out. Lily of the valley also responds well to forcing, a tradition based on the history of Victorian country house gardeners being required to produce the blooms over a long period for their employers. Scone Palace in Scotland apparently grew a vast area of this plant and would dig up clumps in rotation, transferring them to pots under glass in order to promote early displays.

Try this at home by potting up a few in late autumn and leaving in a cold greenhouse or porch until after Christmas when they can be moved into a warm bright spot inside where, before too long, they will hopefully fill your sitting room with scent. I recently purchased a glorious glazed pot emblazoned with lily of the valley, currently housing my aspidistra, but I look forward to filling it with its namesake in future years.

Q Are these plants poisonous?

A All parts of this plant are toxic, containing cardiac glycosides, so keep out of the reach of children and pets.

Q What makes the perfect partner plant?

A Forget-me-nots (*Myosotis sylvatica*) next to lily of the valley is a delightful union.

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Foxglove 'Camelot Cream' Cream flowers with maroon spotting borne all around the stem. Height: 120cm (48"). Spread: 45cm (18").

Foxglove 'Dusky Maid' Flowers in fiery shades of red, orange and gold for much longer than other types – continuing to bloom from June to September. Height: 120cm (48"). Spread: 45cm (18").

Digitalis purpurea The classic, wild foxglove bearing tall spires covered with pink/purple, and occasionally white flowers, with speckled throats. Height: 200cm (79in). Spread: 45cm (18").

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Make way for wonderful Welsh poppies and some of the other varieties Mike recommends

8 perfect poppies

Mike Palmer explains how to grow some of these brilliant border and container beauties

***'Pleasures are like
poppies spread:
You seize the flow'r,
its bloom is shed'
Robert Burns***

With a jewel box-succession of tissue-paper blooms as delicate as butterfly wings, the breathtaking beauty of poppies is a most welcome addition to my garden as it transitions from spring into the (hopefully) sun-baked, golden days of summer.

Hailing from the hot, sunny plains of Northwestern America, through the grassy slopes of the Middle East and Asia to the cool, shady climes of the eastern Himalayan region, there's sure to be a poppy that's practically perfect for you.



Above: There's a poppy for every place, says avid fan Mike Palmer

They can be divided into two types, annuals and perennials, and within these groups there are several shared attributes.

Firstly, they're beloved by pollinators, especially hoverflies and bees which are on the wing, foraging and building hives and nests as poppies begin to bloom.

Secondly, their attractively coloured, cup-shaped flowers might not offer nectar, but are brimful of protein-rich pollen, providing early feeding opportunities ahead of the summer rush. And finally, many poppies prefer a free-draining soil, in full sun, and are relatively low maintenance. Interested? Of course you are!

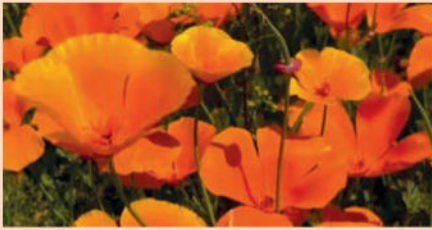
Annual poppies

With a rainbow of colours from reds, oranges and yellows to plums, purples, pinks and whites, annual poppies are often prolific self-seeders, bringing their exuberant joy to our gardens year after year.

Seeds should be sown on the top of a free-draining soil in autumn or early spring where they're to flower - they dislike being

Mike's top poppy picks

Annuals



California poppies
(*Eschscholzia californica*)

With their retina-searing, bright orange single flowers (red, yellow, pink and white varieties are also available), California poppies will ensure you 'have a great day' all summer long.

Growing from 30 to 60cm (1 to 2ft) high, they nestle most accommodatingly between other sun-lovers, including *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna' and *Ceratostigma plumbaginoides* in mixed borders, containers, or in wildflower meadows.

Deadheading will keep those vibrant blooms popping but allow some flowers to go to seed (much like I have, before you say it!) to ensure more sunshine blooms next year.



Papaver somniferum 'Lauren's Grape'

If pressed to choose my desert island annual poppy, it might have to be this dark-plum temptress, with her regal purple petals floating majestically a-top contrasting glaucous, ruffled foliage.

She grows to approximately 1.2m (4ft) and if backlit by the morning or evening sun, will have your heart pitter-pattering for weeks.



Papaver rhoeas 'Amazing Grey'

I'd like to introduce you to something

a little grey, which on paper might not sound the most exciting proposition, but wait until you cast your peepers on this beauty.

A delightful annual with delicate, wiry, hirsute stems, on top of which sit ruffled taffeta tutus of purple-grey with soft, white infusions. At 75cm (29.5in) she proves that life isn't always black and white - it's often (very attractive) shades of grey!

Perennials



Papaver 'Beauty of Livermere'

Vibrant red and so vivid, this classic is still a popular choice for good reason.



Papaver 'Royal Wedding'

The silken-white petals of this poppy are embellished with blackberry-coloured smudges around a deep purple stamen, and are worthy of an appearance on that balcony. Grows to approximately 60cm(h).



Papaver (Oriental Group) 'Patty's Plum'

Swoonsome, this was my first poppy

pin-up, with her melting pot of rich, purple-red petals and boss of inky, dark-blue stamens.



Meconopsis (Fertile Blue Group) 'Lingholm'

Full disclosure, I've not been able to grow this dreamy bloom down here on the sunny south coast – but not for the want of trying!

Also sold as *M. betonicifolia* 'Lingholm', with its sky-blue petals and contrasting golden stamens it is pure class, but needs a cool, partially shaded woodland light with rich, acidic soil.

If you can grow this Himalayan native (I'm not jealous - much) you'll know that it grows to approximately 90 to 120cm (3 to 4ft) and needs protection from strong winds.



Papaver cambricum

My final choice, unlike the aforementioned Himalayan, is the Welsh poppy that grows exuberantly all around my garden in sun and shade.

Simple, diaphanous yellow or orange blooms pop up between hostas, ferns and other perennials. I weed out the numerous self-seeded offspring, but wouldn't be without it. Grows to 30 to 45cm (12 to 15in).



Annual poppies make a great addition to a stunning wildflower meadow



Mike checks his poppies regularly for signs of any pests but rarely has issues

covered with soil or being transplanted and need a period of cold (stratification) for successful germination. Aside from these 'riders', these little superstars are hardy little fellows.

Perennial poppies

If, like me, you're partial to a little drama in your borders then look no further. Shove over Ms Streep, the Oriental poppies have arrived to add a touch of Broadway bravado to your borders.

Most thrive in a free-draining soil in full sun, there's a cast of hundreds to choose from and for gardeners bothered by deer and rabbits, these delightful dames are strictly off their menus.

They dazzle and beguile like no other in the spotlight, but once flowers have faded, I cut the plant back to the base which promotes fresh foliage, though they're best surrounded with later season perennials or shrubs while they rest.

Pests and diseases to watch out for

Allow poppies, and all plants for that matter, to develop resilience by planting



Allow poppies to self seed where you are happy for them to grow

them in the conditions that suit them. Plants grown in the right soil and environment are better placed to fend off attacks from aphids, slugs and snails, mildews and rust, all of which could affect

your pristine poppies.

I check the foliage regularly, especially the undersides, to keep an eye out for possible issues, but I've found them refreshingly easy to look after.

Cramming our borders cheek-by-jowl with plants looks great, but plant too closely and we create warm, humid pockets where pests and diseases thrive.

Poppies appreciate a little space around them so that air can circulate freely, and like all plants will benefit from being watered at ground level, rather than splashing the foliage, which to be honest isn't water-savvy.

How to propagate

Most annual poppies self-seed quite happily in the right conditions, but be ruthless with over-excitable varieties.

Perennial poppies, especially hybrids, may not come from seed, but with care can be divided in autumn, ensuring each division has roots and crown.

I've had better results from pencil-thick root cuttings taken in autumn or spring.

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THE NATURAL FORAGER'S GARDEN

With expert broadcaster, author and long-standing AG columnist, **Anne Swithinbank**



Super summer squash, edible pink petals and garden salad toppings

Anne explains how to make the most of your wild-at-heart garden over the weeks ahead

Summer squash can be as ordinary as marrows and courgettes, or as extraordinary as patty pans (custard marrows) and crooknecks.

Unlike pumpkins and other thick-skinned winter squash, the summer varieties have only thin skins and are cooked fresh or after a brief storage period.

Marrows can be scary when the torpedo-like fruits all ripen at once, but make good eating stuffed and baked or cooked and served in a buttery white or cheese sauce. Marrow flesh changes from pale greenish-white, juicy and refreshing early in their season to dense, yellowy and flavoursome after some keeping. There are mouth-watering recipes about, including soups and curries.

Chopped or in thin chunks, courgettes



Anne is sowing courgette seeds, one per pot

are useful to sweat down with onions and garlic as a basis for many a pasta sauce or sliced and fried to eat on their own. The large yellow flowers are also edible and often served as lightly battered tempura.

I love how words come in and out of fashion. Popular in medieval times, 'sop' originally meant a piece of bread soaked in wine or milk. I guess this could be a treat, perfect for an invalid or someone with few teeth or useful for bringing stale bread back to life.

A 'sop' is also a pacifier, almost like a bribe, or as in 'milk-sop' refers to a weak or foolish person.

There are at least two plants that share the cultivar name 'Sops in Wine'; one a dual-purpose apple useful for both cooking

and eating and the other a garden pink.

The apple is a South West variety first introduced in 1832 and characterised by reddish new growth, red blossom, red fruits, red flesh and pinkish-red juice.

During the 1500s, clove-scented pinks were used to flavour wine and beer as a cheap alternative to true cloves and some of their blooms also looked as if they had been dipped in wine.

These days, the name belongs mainly to a fragrant single pink whose wine-red petals are edged and marked with clear pink but is also used for another, with double white flowers and wine-red centres. The petals of pinks are an edible treat and now's a good time to think about buying, planting and propagating.

How to grow...summer squash

🌱 Gardeners with a greenhouse may well have sown their summer squash under cover in mid-April, although night temperatures were chilly and extra heat was needed. By now, plants from these early sowings will be on their way to making three to four true leaves and after the last frost, can be hardened off and planted out.

It is by no means too late now for a first or second sowing, whether under cover one per module or small pot, or direct to a bed.

The plants enjoy sun and moist but well-drained soil, well-nourished by plenty of well-rotted organic matter. Bush-style marrows and courgettes are spaced 1m (3ft) apart but trailing types such as 'Tromboncino' will need a wider 1.5m (5ft), or a trellis.

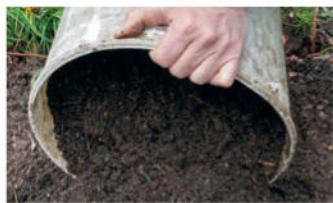


For each squash, I'll tip a bucket of garden compost onto already good soil, fork it in and create a wide mound. For direct sowings, make a flat area in the top and into this, sow two to three seeds. Cover with a cloche or cut-off plastic bottle by night for shelter, warmth and protection from slugs and snails but remove by day to avoid overheating.

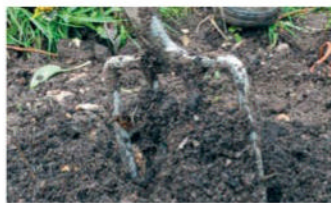
After germination, thin to one (replanting spares into gaps if necessary) and grow on. Keep plants watered during droughts, apply a couple of potassium-rich feeds when the fruits begin to set and look forward to bumper crops. To bypass the sowing stage, there will be plenty of plants around at garden centres ready to plant out when frosts are less likely.

Can you have too many courgettes? Well, yes, but they are very versatile in the kitchen and can be used for pickles and preserves

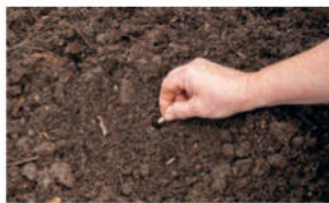
Step by step Direct sowing summer squash



1 First add a bucket of well-rotted compost



2 Fork this in to make a low mound



3 Sow a couple of seeds to a dip made in the mound



4 Cover at night for more warmth for germination

Try these... summer squash

'Disco'

The flying saucer-shaped fruits of custard marrows or patty pans are my favourite summer squash. This one bears white fruits but others are green or yellow and packets of mixed seeds are available. Harvest them while small and tender. www.chilternseeds.co.uk

'Tromboncino'

I guess you could call this heirloom Italian variety a dual-purpose squash, as although many will pick and eat the trombone-shaped fruits like courgettes while young and thin-skinned, they do keep well. Vines are easily trained upwards. www.sarahraven.com

'Rondo Di Nizza'

These rounded to oval green fruits are smooth-skinned and courgette-like but great for cutting into segments or chunks for frying and roasting. Good texture and delicious flavour. www.organiccatalogue.com

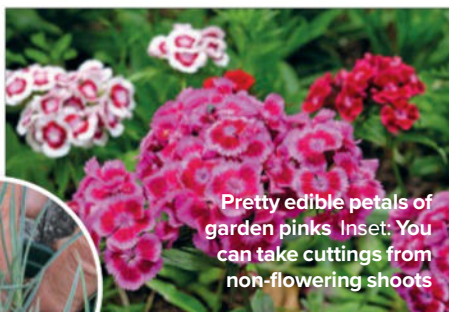
Plant some garden pinks for edible petals

Favourites of the Tudors and Elizabethans, garden pinks belong to the genus *Dianthus* along with carnations and sweet williams. Many bear pink flowers but their name comes from the 'pinking' or serrations of their petal tips.

If you want to be truly old-fashioned, call them gillyflowers; a general term once used for a group of plants grown for their fragrance, including wallflowers and stocks.

There are around 300 species of dianthus, originally from Europe and Asia, and the older pinks with their rich, strong scent descend from *D. plumarius*. These mostly flower only once, but their blue-green leaves arranged in a compact, spreading shape look great along path edges. A good example is the single-flowered 'Queen of Sheba' whose white petals are laced with feathers of rosy pink.

To breed repeat-flowering pinks, the old-fashioned types were crossed with perpetual flowering carnations. The resulting modern pinks bloom on and off from early summer to autumn but not all



Pretty edible petals of garden pinks Inset: You can take cuttings from non-flowering shoots



of them have a rich scent. This will be reflected in their flavour, so read descriptions carefully or, better still, sniff before you buy.

Double, warm-pink 'Widcombe Fair' is clove-scented and attention to dead-heading, watering during droughts and keeping weeds away will help keep flowers coming.

Pinks arriving through the post as small plug plants are best potted into 9cm (3.5in) pots of peat-free compost with a little added grit and nursed along to gain size before being planted out in a sunny, well-drained position.

Elderly plants develop woody bases prone to rotting in winter on wetter soils but non-flowering shoots known as 'pipings' root easily during summer as replacements. To use the petals of pinks, first remove the bitter greenish base and then crystallise them as cake decorations, use them to flavour sugar or scatter on salads.

More foraged salad topping suggestions

✦ Almost every salad I make benefits from a scattering of wild rocket, whose peppery leaves add zing to the subtle flavours of other leaves, fruits and nuts. A versatile evergreen perennial, this rocket persists from year to year and with regular pruning, yields plenty of narrow, indented leaves. Some plants are left to seed and are allowed to grow where they will.

Foraging for salad toppings is a favourite pastime and I'll gather flowers of rosemary, sage and chives, dandelion and, later, rose petals.



Above: Chive flowers make a tasty salad topping Inset: Borage flowers look pretty on a salad



The devoted dahlia grower



© Shutterstock

Find out how to expand your delightful dahlia display

How to make more dahlias for free

Kim O'Brien sings the praises of this easy form of plant propagation

At this time of the season, your dahlia tubers will either be putting out new growth, or be about to. If you've potted them up undercover ahead of planting them out once all danger of frosts have passed, they'll be shooting vigorously with strong, fresh growth that's increasing by the day.

This rapid new growth presents an exciting opportunity for propagation, and dahlias are generous plants when it comes to providing cutting material because they generate and regenerate their shoots readily.

Although they can be expensive to



buy, a tuber that gives rise to five or even 10 viable cuttings, and subsequently yields a batch of new plants, will quickly pay for itself.

The alchemy of a cutting which roots, grows, buds, blooms and subsequently produces its own fully formed tuber in only one season is enough to justify the purchase of even the most expensive dahlia. If justification were needed, of course, for these dazzling dahlias!

Taking straightforward dahlia cuttings

Growing from cuttings isn't mandatory, as dahlias can be easily grown from a tuber, but be aware that the quality of blooms from a tuber does not match those from a cutting.

Flowers raised from cuttings typically have a sharper form and richer depth of colour and for this reason, exhibition growers are encouraged to grow from cuttings. If you are growing purely for pleasure in your own garden - and

← Dahlia cutting with roots forming tubers



Dahlia shoots ideal to take cuttings from



Cuttings growing in vermiculite

for successful rooting.

Indicators that cuttings have rooted include an increase in size, new leaves and plants leaning towards the light. Eventually roots will trail from the bottom of the pot.

Water well to ease the cutting free, then pot on into good quality peat-free compost and allow it to continue its journey towards becoming a full, flowering plant.

what better reason is there! - there is no pressure to take cuttings, and growing from tubers alone will more than suffice.

However, for beginners looking to try their hand at taking cuttings and getting lots of free plants, the process is straightforward.

Remove a shoot around 4 to 6cm (2 to 3in) in length with a clean, sharp knife, ideally taking a small slice of the tuber with it. This sliver of root material increases the cutting's chance of success. Be aware, though, that doing so may 'blind' that particular eye (growth point), limiting how many future shoots the tuber will produce.

Using cinnamon as rooting powder
A trickier method involves carefully

wiggling the shoot free, leaving the tuber intact. Without a slice of tuber, not every cutting will root, but it encourages the tuber to send out more new shoots, often three or more to replace the one that's been removed. This is ideal if your aim is to take several cuttings from one plant.

When it comes to rooting, ground cinnamon is a good, natural alternative to synthetic hormone rooting powder. Dahlias respond well to it, and its mild anti-fungal properties help to prevent damping-off.

Cuttings can be rooted in compost, but due to their open structure, pure vermiculite or horticultural sand or grit gives a higher success rate. These substrates drain freely yet provide the balance of aeration and moisture needed

Dreamy Dahlia

Dahlia 'Purple Flame' has a velvet-like depth of colour



Above: What a dazzler - *Dahlia* 'Purple Flame'



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Cottage garden classics



Liz Zorab celebrates these traditional plants that have remained firm

favourites for a reason

I think a good cottage garden plant needs to be either very easy to care for, or give such a beautiful flower display that it is worth the attention lavished on it. Luckily, there is a huge selection to choose from and I've picked a few of the favourites that have featured in my gardens over the years.

With the exception of a rose, these are all herbaceous perennials that spread each year to fill spaces in the garden. If they outgrow their allotted spaces, they can be divided and moved to other areas, or given to friends.

Phlox paniculata 'Bright Eyes'

There are so many varieties of phlox to choose from, two of my favourites are a pure white-flowered variety called 'White Admiral' and 'Bright Eyes', a pale pink flower with a deeper pink towards the centre.

Phlox paniculata 'Bright Eyes' grows to 90cm (3ft) height and 50cm (20in) spread. They are unfussy about soil and situation, but may fail to thrive on dry or waterlogged soils. Phlox are fully hardy and flower from summer to autumn.

Geum 'Mrs J. Bradshaw'

Geums are reliable, free-flowering plants. 'Mrs J. Bradshaw' has bright red, semi-double flowers which are held above the foliage on wiry stems. Height and spread 60cm (2ft).

It grows best in full sun in any soil except clay and is hardy throughout the UK and Ireland, even in a severe winter.

Campanula lactiflora 'Prichard's Variety'

This clump-forming perennial has an upright habit and plenty of bell-shaped flowers.

Grow in full sun or partial shade in alkaline or neutral, chalk or loam soil. Growing to 75cm (29.5in) in height, it prefers a sheltered spot, but can be staked if on a windier site.

It is fully hardy, even in the severest of



Get the look of cottage-style planting, Liz explains how



Choose from one of the many varieties of phlox, such as *Phlox paniculata* 'Bright Eyes'



Easy to grow in full sun, *Geum* 'Mrs J. Bradshaw' is a free-flowering stunner

winters. Propagate by division in spring or autumn.

Lysimachia punctata

The first time I saw the yellow flowers of *Lysimachia punctata*, I was smitten! They grow in the leaf axils around the upper part of the stem and the intensity of the yellow colouring is striking.

It's a spreading herbaceous perennial that could become a bit of a bully if left for long periods, but all the same, it has earned a place in each garden I've tended.

Grow in clay or loam soils in full sun or partial shade, in moist but free-draining, or even slightly boggy, soil.

It is hardy throughout the UK and Ireland and grows to 90cm (3ft) high with a spread of 75cm (29.5in).

For added interest, try *Lysimachia punctata* 'Alexander', which has cream and green variegated leaves.



Lovely bell-shaped flowers of *Campanula lactiflora* 'Prichard's Variety'



This spreading herbaceous perennial, *Lysimachia punctata* needs keeping in its place but it's lovely to grow



Unfussy repeat flowering blooms of hemerocallis



A delightful pink-flowered *Astrantia* 'Roma'

Achillea millefolium 'Cerise Queen'

A friend gave me some tiny plug plants of achillea and within three years, they had grown into a large area filled with fragrant, almost pungent, foliage with flat heads of clusters of tiny colourful flowers.

Highly attractive to pollinators, achilleas are fast-growing, robust plants with spreading roots that have the potential to become a nuisance, so try growing in large pots if space is limited.

Achilleas are available in a wide range of colours from white to yellow and red. 'Cerise Queen' has vibrant pink petals that fade to pale pink or white as the flowers age. They prefer not to be in wet soil during winter, but are otherwise, fully hardy. Height and spread 60cm (2ft).

Hemerocallis

Often known as the daylily, the flowers of these clump-forming plants are short-lived, but more flowers quickly open from June to September.

The flowers are held above the strap-like leaves at the top of the fairly stiff

flower stems. Hemerocallis are available in a wide range of colours, from darkest red-brown to off-white. Height depends on variety, from 20cm to 150cm (8 to 59in) and spread 30cm to 75cm (12 to 29.5in).

They are unfussy about soil and situation, and will thrive in full sun and partial shade.

Penstemon digitalis 'Mystica'

An interesting addition to the cottage garden, I suggest it in place of the more common border hybrid penstemons.

This one has evergreen leaves at the base and produces deepening shades of bronze leaves throughout the growing season. Panicles of flowers appear in early summer and stand out well against the colourful leaves.

Penstemon digitalis 'Mystica' grows to 75cm (29.5in) height, 45cm (15in) spread and prefers full sun, in well-drained soil, in a sheltered spot. Avoid growing in clay soil. It is hardy in most places in the UK and Ireland, even in a severe winter.

Astrantia 'Roma'

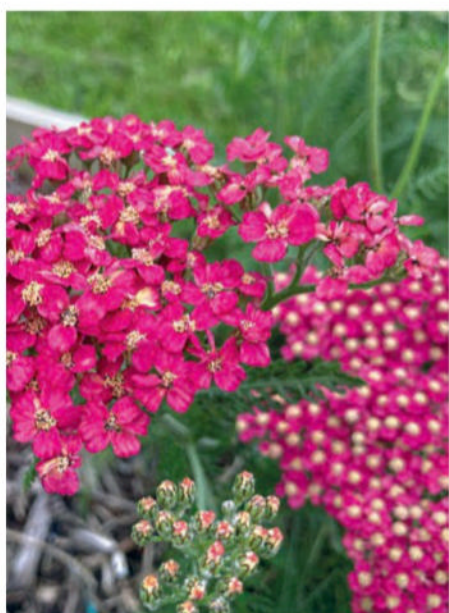
I have a couple of astrantias in my garden, but neither are this delightful pink-flowered variety. 'Roma' is strong-growing and has a long flowering season. Deadhead regularly to encourage continued flowering from June to September.

Astrantias are unfussy plants that are hardy across UK and Ireland, even in the severest of winters. They will thrive in full sun or partial shade, although they don't like prolonged periods of dryness at the roots. Height 60cm (2ft) and 40cm (16in) spread.

Leucanthemum x superbum 'Wirral Supreme'

Think of big daisies and you'll most likely imagine leucanthemums. These clump-forming shasta daisies can be quite vigorous, but are easy to keep in check by lifting and dividing in spring. I love the splash of clear white that they add to the summer border.

Leucanthemum x superbum 'Wirral Supreme' grows to 70cm (27.5in) high



Penstemon digitalis 'Mystica' is an attractive addition to the cottage garden



Clump-forming daisies of *Leucanthemum x superbum* 'Wirral Supreme' provide a lovely splash of white in a border

Popular with pollinators and best grown in pots, *Achillea millefolium* 'Cerise Queen'



← Fall in love with flowers even more with the addition of *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae* 'Andenken an Alma Pötschke'



The loveliest of lupins provide height and colour to the cottage garden border

and has flowers that are 10cm (4in) across. The flowers are highly attractive to flying insects.

Place between other plants or provide support, to prevent stems flopping over in the wind.

Symphyotrichum novae-angliae 'Andenken an Alma Pötschke'

Previously known as asters, these are the plants that helped me fall in love with gardening. I saw how to propagate them from cuttings, tried it and was hooked.

They are easy-going, fully hardy plants, and will thrive in full sun and partial shade.

Available in a range of colours, but for a strong statement in the border, try 'Andenken an Alma Pötschke'. Year after year the plant spreads and provides a more striking display. Height 90-120cm (35-47in) and spread 120-150cm (47-59in).

Propagate by division in spring and they also grow easily from cuttings.

Rosa Kew Gardens ('Ausfence')

I can't imagine a cottage garden without



Roses are a firm cottage garden classic, choose from many varieties such as *Rosa Kew Gardens* ('Ausfence')

at least one rose in it. Over the past few years, I have enjoyed the mass of single flowers produced by *Rosa Kew Gardens* ('Ausfence'). It has an upright habit, although is nicely bushy and has the advantage of being thornless, and is repeat flowering.

The lightly scented flowers grow in large clusters and are cream with yellow stamens.

It grows on all soils except waterlogged or very dry and prefers a sheltered spot. That said, we have it growing on an exposed hillside and it produces plenty of flowers each year. Height and spread 125cm (4ft).

Lupin

Lupins are robust and, if you deadhead on a very regular basis, will continue to put on a show from early summer until the first frosts. They are very easy to grow from seed and come in a wide range of single colour or two-tone flowers. Modern hybrids offer more compact plants which are ideal for smaller gardens or growing in tubs. Provide support for plants on an exposed site and also to prevent plants from flopping over into pathways and surroundings plants as they become top-heavy with flower spikes. Lupin aphids can be a nuisance, but can easily be removed by wiping a hand along each stem on a regular basis. Height 100 to 120cm (39in to 47in) and 60cm (2ft) spread.

Quick guide to petal arrangements

Single flowers usually have one row of petals around a centre, where the stamens are.

Semi-double flowers may have two or three rows of petals around a centre.

Double flowers have multiple layers of petals around the centre and in some cases, the stamens may not be immediately visible until the flower's petals start to droop or fall.

Fully double flowers have a ball or dome of petals with no visible stamens.



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Rosie's resilient gardening

Wonderful willow project ideas

Rosie Irving offers more thrifty gardening ideas with willow, dogwood and more

A few weeks ago I had tulips and spring-flowering perennials growing in this container. I now want to replace them with super summer stunners, including a short clematis.

You might recall I placed a large pot upside down in this container to save on compost as the spring plants were all shallow-rooted.

As the clematis needs a deeper root run, the upside-down pot has been removed and extra compost added, which will not only help its roots stay cool as they reach down to the bottom of the container, but also provide a greater supply of nutrients to feed the plants throughout the summer.

This beautiful compact clematis, *C. Acropolis* ('Evipo078') from the Boulevard Series, should only reach a height of just 1.2m (4ft).

It came with a wigwam support already in place, but the plant will need a taller structure to cling to, which is where willow or dogwood stems come into play as they are the ideal flexible choice and a stylish addition to your containers.

■ For this 33cm (13in) high container you'll need just three stems around 1.8 to 2.15m (6 to 7ft) long each with an approximate diameter of 4cm (1.5in).

■ Just push one stem down the side of one end of the container until it reaches the bottom and then loop it over to the opposite site and push it down to the bottom of the container.

■ Next, loop two separate stems across the existing one, pushing them down both sides of the container all the way to the bottom.

■ I've planted some super-bright *Calibrachoa* Cabaret Good Night Kiss ('Balcabooni') to cascade gently over the sides, and a couple of sweetly scented



Rosie has created an attractive willow support for her potted clematis

Nemesia 'Lady Ruby'. The eagle-eyed among you will notice I've colour coordinated the flowers on the plants!

■ Planting some dwarf French beans and/or mange tout around the base of the stems will turn the planter into a true cottage garden-style container.

A note of caution

If using willow, strip the bark from all the way around the base of the stem up to above the level of soil/compost and plunge the stripped stems into boiling water before using as, if not, they're very likely to root. Dogwood stems are less likely to develop roots.



Rosie has planted a wonderfully colour-coordinated pot!



Cut conifer stems are a brilliant way of creating garden 'rooms' and private areas

How to green your screen

Screens are an easy way to divide areas of the garden, as well as creating a section that feels more private.

There are many designs to choose from, all with intricate patterns, but they can look a bit bare, especially if installed in a paved area with no nearby soil for growing plants.

However, I've discovered a way to instantly 'green your screen' and it couldn't be simpler.

■ Cut several 50 to 60cm (20 to 24in) lengths of conifer stem and attach them to the screen with florist wire.

■ Depending on time of the year, weather conditions and aspect, the branches should remain looking reasonably fresh for between one and three months before needing to be replaced.

Top tip

■ Leaves of the conifer *Thuja plicata* (Western Red Cedar), give off a delicious pineapple aroma when brushed against and if available would be my first choice to 'green my screen.'



This bare screen was 'greened up' with conifer cuttings

A natural alternative to rooting hormone powder

On the subject of willow, did you know that willow water makes a great free, natural alternative to commercial hormone rooting powder and that it's quick and easy to make?

There are two ways to do this:

■ The quickest way is to take a handful of actively growing young willow stems, remove and compost the leaves and then cut the stems into short lengths of approximately 2.5cm (1in).

■ Place the cut stems into either a heat-proof glass jar or plastic container and then carefully fill, almost to the top, with boiling water.

■ After 24 hours strain the water into another jar and your homemade willow water is now ready to use on your cuttings.

■ You can also use cold tap water, in which case let the cut stems soak for several days before straining the water.

■ The other method is to place a handful of 30cm (12in) lengths of growing young willow stems into a jar of cold water so that approximately a third to a half of their length is above water and leave them in the water for several days before straining the water.



Soaked willow cuttings make a natural alternative to hormone rooting products

This is a good method if you want to create new willow plants as well as make a natural growth accelerator.

If this is your aim, leave the stems in the water for at least two weeks, by which time they should have developed 'water roots' and be ready to plant out.

The strained willow water should keep for up to two months (possibly longer but I haven't tested that length of time) if stored in a jar or container with a tight-fitting lid and placed in a cool place out of direct sunlight.

It's a good idea to label the jar to remind you what that clear liquid is! Adding a use-by date is also useful, use the date that comes two months after you have bottled the liquid.

How to use the willow water when planting cuttings

Have you ever wondered how willow stems root so quickly?

It's because they are full of plant growth hormones, one type which tells the stems to grow new roots, the other acts as a defender against pathogens which might otherwise try to attack the plant.

When soaking willow stems in water, both those types of hormones escape and produce a liquid that will not only help other cuttings develop new roots but also protects them against soil pathogen attack.

Isn't nature amazing?!



After 24 hours this willow water will be ready for use



Willow water for rooting will store for at least two months



Hang your willow wreath on a fence or wall before adding the potted plants



Use the base of a large pot to create a circular wreath

A quick and easy seasonal wreath

Wreaths aren't just for Christmas, they are the perfect way to display a floral selection of what's looking good in your garden at any time of year.

Here's a super-quick way of making one to hang against a wall or fence and use to display small pots of seasonal beauties.

I'm using willow stems, but any flexible stem such as dogwood or a vine such as honeysuckle will work well.



This pretty pansy wreath brightens a drab fence

■ Grab a handful of stems and place them, tips first, into the bottom of a round, largish plastic pot (the container I used had a diameter of 35cm (14in) but you can scale down or up depending on your preference and amount of available stems).

■ Then wind them round the base of the pot, keeping stems in the pot while tying them at intervals around the circle with florist wire or twine.

■ After wiring my wreath onto the screen, I placed three small terracotta pots onto the base of the wreath and tied each of them to the screen.

■ I then pushed wire up through the base and one side of each of the pots, leaving a long enough section at the top and bottom to tie each pot to the screen.

You can follow more of Rosie's thrifty adventures on instagram @rosieposieirving



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Gardening's king of trivia and brain-teasers, **Graham Clarke**

Asparagus spears

Asparagus is the one vegetable that is worth growing to save money. It's expensive to buy, because the grower has to wait a long time from planting to harvesting (at least two years), and then the cropping season is short. So, in order to make the ground pay for itself, high prices have to be charged. Quicker crops, which give a quicker turnaround of cash, are invariably cheaper.

Asparagus spears are harvested for just about six weeks in the year, and the season is starting now.



White asparagus

In restaurants, you are often served with thick, 'white' asparagus, very unlike the spears you grow at home. These are produced by farmers who cover their asparagus rows with fabric cloches, or pile soil over the crowns, to ensure the spears remain in complete darkness. Once they break through the mini earth hills, the spears are painstakingly harvested by excavating and then slicing through the stems at the 'old' soil level.

■ Usually, leeks, endive, chicory and celery are made tenderer by blanching. However, with asparagus, the opposite is true: white spears need peeling, and take three times longer to cook than the green types.

Wow! I didn't know that...

■ The Vale of Evesham in Worcestershire is the largest producer of asparagus in Northern Europe.

■ Asparagus is a member of the lily family.

■ It is said that white asparagus makes a good hangover cure – particularly if you serve it with a hollandaise sauce and mashed potato!

This fortnight in gardening history

14 May 1700 Mary Delaney, English writer and paper flower artist, was born in Coulston, Wiltshire.

16 May 1846 Henry Elwes, tree expert and plant collector, and after whom the snowdrop *Galanthus elwesii* was named, was born in Cheltenham, Glos. He died in 1922.

18 May 1830 Inventor Edwin Budding signed an agreement with John Ferrabee of the Phoenix Iron Works, Stroud, Glos., for the manufacture of the first lawnmowers.

26 May 1863 William Jackson (W.J.) Bean, was born in North Yorkshire. One time curator at Kew, he wrote the invaluable *Trees & Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles* (essential reading for horticultural students in the 20th century). He died in 1947.

Crossword... just for fun!



ACROSS

- 1 Small and even some miniature roses are sometimes referred to as _____ roses (5)
- 3 The spruce tree genus (5)
- 7 Alpine plants, when planted outside, are perhaps most at home on the _____ garden (4)
- 8 Trim, as in a hedge or the edge of a lawn (4)
- 9 Aubergines are often called _____ plants (3)
- 11 Horse ones come from *Aesculus hippocastanum*! (9)
- 14 Female pronoun in three quarters of a shed! (3)
- 16 The main (flattened) organ of photosynthesis and transpiration in green plants (4)
- 17 Mark left (usually on the skin, but also on woody plant tissue) by the healing of an injury (4)
- 18 The century plant genus (5)
- 19 Sounds like a posted fragrance! (5)

DOWN

- 1 A member of the rose family, this is the pear genus (5)
- 2 The Chilean blue crocus genus (11)
- 4 Genus of plants, including the star grass and water fennel (11)
- 5 Common name for the tree *Populus tremula* (5)
- 6 *Rosa canina* is the _____ rose (3)
- 9 Makes something unpleasant less serious, as found in plant dis_____! (5)
- 10 *Hosta* 'Goldbrook _____' and *Magnolia* '_____': a spirit in Arabian folklore! (5)
- 12 The bog arum genus (5)
- 13 'Bud _____' is the emergence of new leaves on a plant at the beginning of each growing season (5)
- 15 The fruit of the rose (3)

ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD ABOVE
ACROSS 1 Patio 3 Picea 7 Rock 8 Clip 9 Egg 11 Chestnuts 14 She 16 Leaf 17 Scar 18 Agave 19 Scent DOWN 1 Pyrus 2 Tecophilaea 4 Callitriche 5 Aspen 6 Dog 9 Eases 10 Genie 12 Callia 13 Burst 15 Hip



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Chrysanthemums have been grown for millennia for their resilience and vibrant colours

How to grow chrysanthemums

Find out how to grow this lovely cut flower choice

Cultivated for over 2,500 years, chrysanthemums originated in China and spread to Europe, where they were admired for their resilience, vibrant colours and late-season blooms. These versatile flowers come in various shapes and sizes, thrive in diverse

conditions and make excellent long-lasting cut flowers. Easy to grow and rewarding, they are a welcome addition for any keen gardener or flower lover.

Choosing cultivars to grow
Chrysanthemums naturally bloom from August to December and flowering times fall into three categories: Early (Outdoors in August-September), Late (Indoors in November-December), and October-flowering.



Fantasy bloom



Large exhibition bloom



Above: Early flowering sprays and cushion mums



Reflexed bloom



Large single

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Early flowering mums are ideal for beginners



Find out how to plant out and care for your chrysanthemum



Take cuttings from overwintered stock from February onwards

With hundreds of cultivars available, there's a perfect chrysanthemum for every garden. For beginners, early flowering sprays, cushion 'mums' or blooms are ideal, as they flower outdoors from late August to the end of September.

To ensure the best quality plants, purchase rooted cuttings from a specialist nursery or your local chrysanthemum society plant sale. It's best to order early, as nurseries typically require four weeks to root cuttings - longer for more mature plants.

The timing of when you receive your plants depends on your growing facilities:

Seasonal Care

Pinching, or stopping

This involves removing 1-1.5cm (1/2in) of the growing tip to encourage the development of side shoots and multiple flowering stems. This should be done between early April and early June, depending on the cultivar and your location. Cushion mums may be allowed to grow naturally.

Side shoot removal

After stopping, allow shoots to develop to approximately 10cm (4in) long then carefully remove excess side shoots, leaving two to five per plant to develop into strong flowering stems.

Tying and staking

Regularly tie plants to their supports to protect them from wind damage.

Watering

Once established, water as appropriate to any border plants.

Feeding

Apply a balanced fertiliser in mid-June.

Disbudding for larger blooms

When a bud appears in the growing tip, remove side buds to allow a single large bloom per stem. Spray chrysanthemums naturally develop multiple blooms per stem, requiring no disbudding.

Flowering

Once buds appear in July, keep compost or soil moist to support flower development.

- Heated greenhouse: February onwards
- Cold greenhouse: Mid-March
- Cold frame: Mid-April
- Garden only: Mid-May

Upon receiving your rooted cuttings, pot them into 9cm (3.5in) pots or plant them in seed trays with John Innes No. 1 compost or a good quality peat-free multi-purpose compost. Water lightly and leave several days before watering again to allow the roots to establish in the fresh compost.

Grow the plants in a bright, frost-free greenhouse (fleece may be used for protection). In early April plants are typically potted on into 13cm (5in) pots before they are moved into a cold frame. Start ventilating gradually to harden the plants off for planting out from mid-May onwards.

Preparing the soil

Chrysanthemums will grow in most soils, but like most herbaceous plants will do best on an open site, in well-drained, fertile soil. Preparing the growing area should begin in late autumn – early winter, by improving the soil with bulky organic matter, garden compost or composted manure.

Planting out

Planting takes place in May or after the last frost. Space them 45cm (18in) apart in rows with 45cm (18in) between rows to ensure they receive adequate light, water and nutrients. Support the cultivars that grow between 1-1.5m (3-5ft) tall.

Cutting for display

One of the biggest reasons to grow chrysanthemums is their suitability as cut flowers and their exceptional vase life. For the best results:

- Cut flowers early in the morning or evening when stems are hydrated, and avoid hot sunny weather.
- Immediately place them in clean water and remove any leaves below the waterline to prevent bacterial growth.



- Change the water every few days and trim stems slightly to prolong freshness.

Overwintering and stock selection

At the end of the flowering season, cut back plants to 30cm (12in). Select only the healthiest plants. Lift the root balls from the soil, trim the roots, and plant them in seed trays with moist compost. Store in a frost-free greenhouse, garage, or shed, ensuring they don't dry out completely.

How to propagate your own plants

The best way to grow chrysanthemums is from cuttings taken from your own overwintered stock, cuttings can be taken in February onwards.

1. Four to six weeks before taking cuttings, bring stock into a greenhouse (ideally eight to 10°C) and water lightly, this will bring them into growth.
2. When new basal shoots reach 4 to 5cm (1.5 to 2in), take cuttings by snapping off the shoots and removing lower leaves.
3. Insert cuttings into moist compost trays ideally with bottom heat (15 to 18°C) for faster rooting.
4. After three to four weeks the cuttings will be rooted, these can be potted into 9cm (3.5in) pots.

The National Chrysanthemum Society Q&A

Q Where is the best place to plant chrysanthemums?

A Chrysanthemums grow best when they have a bed or pot to themselves.

Q Can I grow chrysanthemums in pots?

A Definitely, chrysanthemums can be grown successfully in pots. Cushion mums work well in pots and add a splash of colour throughout the autumn.

Q Can I grow chrysanthemums indoors?

A Yes, chrysanthemums are readily available as houseplants. They require bright, indirect light and good air circulation

For more information see www.chrysanthemum-ncs.org



Chrysanthemums have a long vase life as long as you change the water regularly



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THE YEAR-ROUND KITCHEN GARDEN

With **Stephanie Hafferty**



Home-grown guacamole recipes

Stephanie Hafferty reveals how to use peas in place of avocado with these two delicious treats

Guacamole is traditionally made with avocado, but this ingredient is very difficult to grow in the UK. Peas, which are abundant in our climate, make a delicious - and much cheaper - homegrown alternative guacamole-style dip or salad. Simply treat them the same as you would an avocado.

Peas need picking regularly to encourage them to continue producing more flowers and pods. Harvest garden peas when the pods feel plump and full of peas and shell the peas, placing them into one bowl and the pods in another. The pods can be used to make soup or turned into pea pod wine.



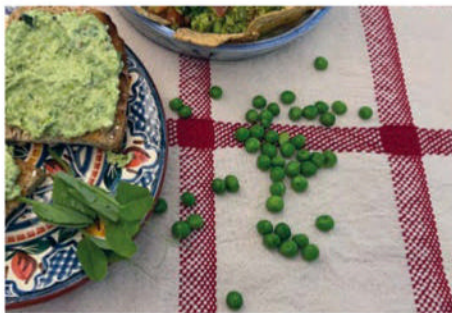
Freshly shelled peas will store for around four days in the fridge.

These recipes are gorgeous made with freshly podded peas, and are equally delicious made with frozen peas including

those bought in the supermarket. You can also use marrowfat peas, soaked and cooked first.

Both dishes will keep for around five days in the fridge.

Smooth green pea 'guacamole'



Method

- Cook the peas for a couple of minutes in boiling water, then plunge into cold iced water to stop the cooking process. Leave to cool.
- Once cooled, place in a food processor with the lime juice and pulse until smooth. If you don't have a food processor, mash the peas with a fork or potato masher.
- Transfer to a bowl and add the yogurt, garlic, chilli, ground cumin and most of the chopped herbs, reserving some to sprinkle on the top.
- Season with salt and pepper, then mix to combine everything. Taste and adjust the seasoning as desired. Sprinkle the extra herbs and drizzle a little olive oil on the top.
- Leave for 30 mins before serving.



This paté resembles avocado guacamole and is especially delicious served on toast at breakfast, with a poached egg on top if you wish.

Ingredients

- 200g (7oz) peas
- The juice of one lime
- 2 tbsp yogurt (or sour cream, olive oil or plant-based yogurt)
- 1 red chilli, chopped
- a small bunch of fresh coriander
- 1/2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- a little olive oil for drizzling
- sea salt and pepper

Chunky pea and tomato 'guacamole'

This flavourful dish is so very moreish served with tortilla chips, or on top of a baked potato.

Ingredients

- The same as the smooth 'guacamole' plus:
- Two medium-sized tomatoes, diced
- 2 to 4 spring onions, chopped

Method

- Make as above but pulse the peas for a chunkier texture.
- Combine with the diced tomatoes and two to four spring onions, according to your taste for onions.
- Taste and adjust the seasoning.
- Leave for at least 30 minutes for the flavours to develop before serving.

Variations

- Swap the red chilli with minced pickled jalapeño, or use some hot sauce.
- Replace the coriander with mint, parsley, lemon balm, chervil or other flavourful garden herbs according to taste or what's in your garden.

For more recipe, gardening and course information from Stephanie see www.nodighome.com



GROWING FROM SEED

with Ruth Hayes, AG's gardening expert

A groundcover star for borders and pots

Expect a flurry of pink flowers from easy-going soapwort

I always think that groundcover plants are very much the unsung heroes of the garden, yet they are incredibly useful and many of them are perennially beautiful too.

They block weeds, are often happy in shady or rocky areas that don't suit other varieties, and in these times of increasing climate uncertainty, they protect the soil from torrential rain and baking sun.

One of my favourites is *Saponaria ocymoides*, also known as rock soapwort and tumbling tom. It's a perennial member of the soapwort family, a low-growing, mat-forming evergreen that is covered with pretty pink flowers during the summer months.

It is easy to grow and easy to maintain, even though it can spread quickly, and makes a delightful splash of colour as a 'spiller' plant pouring down the sides of a patio container or hanging basket and as a rockery plant.

Tumbling tom also works well along the front of borders and alongside the edges of paths and, at the other extreme, cascading down the side of stone or brick walls, softening their lines.



Above: *Saponaria ocymoides* can be used as groundcover or as a trailing container plant

Sow it now in a tray of dampened compost, topped with a thin layer of compost or vermiculite, and when the seedlings have developed their first sets of 'true' leaves rather than their germination leaflets, pot them on into individual containers.

Once the seedlings have grown and been hardened off they can be added to the garden. *Saponaria ocymoides* plants are relatively untroubled by disease, but do watch out for slugs and snails that will munch on young leaves and flowers.

Sow some annual 'joy of love'

Corncockles make a light, airy display

- Sometimes the easiest seeds give the most vibrant results, and so it is with many hardy annuals.
- One of my favourites is corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*), which produces open trumpet-shaped flowers in shades of pink, and also white, on strong, straight stems that can grow to 90cm (3ft) tall.
- This plant, also nicknamed joy of love and bulwg yr ŷd (corn bulb), likes a sunny spot and can be sown directly into the soil now to produce a pretty, airy display. You could try mixing the seeds with other annuals such as scarlet field poppies, corn flowers and annual grasses.
- Rake and break up the soil to a fine, crumbly tilth and scatter the seeds freely so they grow in an attractive natural shape.
- Wear gloves when sowing as the plant is toxic if eaten and the seeds should also be kept away from children and pets.
- Flowering can last from June until the autumn, after which corn cockles will set seeds if left standing in autumn and return in future years.

Corncockle flowers are white or pink



All images credit: © Shutterstock

What's On

16 May: Specialist Plant Fair, The Coach House Garden, Ampney Crucis, Cirencester, GL7 5RY. 10am-2pm.

16 May: The Generous Gardener's Specialist Plant Fair, Charlton Farm, Pink Lane. Malmesbury, Wiltshire, SN16 9DS. 10am-2pm.

16-18 May: St Michael's Hospice Plant Fair, St Michael's Hospice, Bartestree, Hereford, Herefordshire, HR1 4HA. 10.30am-3.30pm.

16-18 May: The National Flower Show, Hylands House Back Lawn, Hylands House and Estate, London Road, Chelmsford, Essex, CM2 8WQ.

17 May: Compton Allotments' Plant Stall at Compton Fete, Village Green at Compton, Guildford, Surrey. Noon-4.30pm.

17 May: Hardy Plant Society Midlands Group Plant Fair, Bentley Heath Community Centre, Widney Road, Bentley Heath, Solihull, West Midlands, B93 9BQ. 10am-noon.

17-18 May: Feckenham Flower and Garden Festival, Feckenham, near Redditch, Worcestershire, West Midlands. 11am-5pm.

17 May: Plant Swap, Community Hub at Manchester Craft and Design Centre, 17 Oak Street, Manchester, M4 5JD. Noon-1pm.

18 May: Rare Plant Fair, American Museum and Gardens, Claverton Manor, Claverton Down, Claverton, Bath, Somerset, BA2 7BD.

18 May: Plant Hunters' Fair, Southwell Minster, Church Street, Southwell, Nottinghamshire, NG25

OHD. 11am-4pm.

18 May: Hardy Plant Society Clwyd Group Plant Fair, Stamford Gate Hotel, Halkyn Road, Holywell, Flintshire, Wales, Sat nav users CH8 7SJ. 10.30am-1.30pm.

18 May: Alresford Watercress Festival, Alresford, Winchester, Hampshire.

18 May: Plant Fair, The Walled Garden, Moreton, Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 8RG.

20-24 May: RHS Chelsea Flower Show, Royal Hospital, Chelsea, London, SW3 4SL.

24 May: Plant Hunters' Fair, Carsington Water, Big Lane, Ashbourne, Derbyshire, DE6 1ST. 10am-4pm.

24-26 May: Kent Garden Show, Kent Showground, Detling, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 3JF.

Dates and times are correct when going to press. Thanks to pumpkinbeth.com for the listings - check her site for more details. Please send us details of your events at least six weeks in advance to editor@amateurgardening.com Always check events are going ahead before leaving home.

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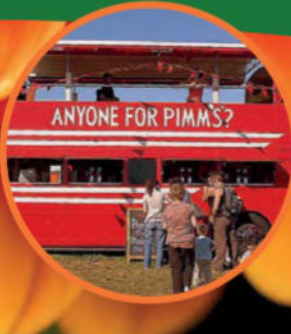


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Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

Looking after young citrus trees

Weekly feeding should herald robust growth

Q We recently purchased the orange and lemon trees shown in the photo. Unfortunately there were no care instructions with them, so please can you advise us on how best to keep them healthy and happy?

Marilyn Allen, Sutton, Surrey

A The best way to help your orange and lemon trees thrive is to position them outdoors in summer and bring them inside when nights threaten frost in late autumn, keeping them cool in winter, at a temperature of 10-12C (50-55F).

As for encouraging robust growth, feed them weekly with summer and winter food for citrus trees, or a brand that supplies nutrients to keep them growing strongly all year round.

When the root ball appears to be rising in its pot, repot your charges in spring, in ericaceous compost, in a container 15cm (6in) larger in diameter. Ideally, water well before repotting so that roots don't cling to



the pot walls and break.

If pests such as spider mite, whitefly aphids, scale insects, mealybugs or thrips appear, remove them by hand, consider a preventative natural product such as Clean and Guard Soap or biological methods of control.

Another way to deter glasshouse red spider mite is to stand your plants on trays of damp pebbles. This slightly raises humidity levels, which the mites hate.

How can I win with rose cuttings?

Q I have never been successful taking rose cuttings. Is it a good idea to try and take some now?

Bryan Ferguson (via email)

A I am sorry that your attempts to take rose cuttings have been unsuccessful. I suggest that you try again in September with ramblers, climbers, floribundas, shrub roses and miniature varieties. Cuttings from hybrid teas rarely root.

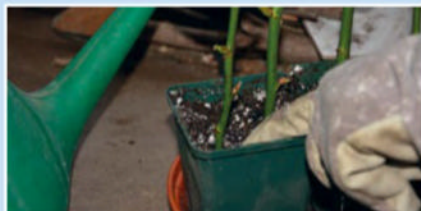
All you do is take pencil-thick, side-shoot cuttings about 23cm (9in) long. Make a sloping cut above the topmost leaf and a horizontal cut at the base, about 2in/5cm from where the shoot was attached to the main stem. Remove all leaves apart from the top two.

Insert cuttings to two thirds their length into a straight-sided trench in a well-

drained part of the garden and firm soil around them. Refirm soil after frost has loosened it. Keep cuttings damp in dry weather.

Alternatively, root your cuttings in pots of gritty peat-free multipurpose compost.

Shoots should have rooted by November when they can be moved to their flowering positions.



Above: Take cuttings in September for healthy new stock

Quick questions & answers



Who is this sunny chap?

Q This appeared in our garden last year - am I right thinking it's a rudbeckia?

Moirra Thomas (via email)

A The mystery flower is not a rudbeckia but a dwarf sunflower (*helianthus*). There are several varieties and I suspect that it is an annual but it may be a perennial.

I suggest that you leave it to die back after flowering and see if new shoots appear next spring - if they do, that will prove it's not in fact an annual but a perennial variety.

What are these red devils?

Q These beasts are wrecking my lilies - what should I do?

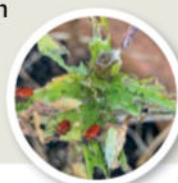
Mark Alderton (via email)

A The 'red perils' are lily beetles, which can chomp their way through a lot of lilies. To add to their bad reputation, their larvae cover themselves in their own poo for protection. Charming!

A company called Grazers (www.grazers.co.uk) makes an excellent deterrent spray, which doesn't kill anything and helps strengthen the plants.

It sends the pests packing but also, importantly, leaves them in the food chain for predators. The product is also widely available in garden centres.

Right: Lily beetles can cause serious damage





Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

What is chomping our viburnums?

Beetles and their grubs are Public Enemy No1 here

Q Something has been attacking our viburnum bushes. There's a pigeon nesting in one of them - could it be the culprit?

Sheila Lawton (via email)

A Sadly, your viburnum has been attacked by viburnum beetles, a pest which is specific to *Viburnum opulus*, *V. lantana* and *V. tinus*.

Most of the damage is done by the larvae in spring, but adult beetles will also make holes in the leaves later in the summer.

Viburnum beetle eggs overwinter in canker-like pits on stems and creamy-yellow grubs with dark markings appear from April to June. They grow to about 7mm before burrowing into the soil about a month later to pupate, and the small, grey-brown adults emerge in July and August.



Viburnum beetle damage is unsightly but not fatal

Luckily, although the beetle damage disfigures the foliage, it should not affect the trees or cause them to die off.

As a result, we advise gardeners to tolerate their presence, picking off the larvae when seen and leaving the rest to be predated by birds and ground beetles.

Will leggy tomato be any good?

Q I sowed a 'Reisling' tomato seed that I'd saved, just to see if it was viable, and it's now 30cm (12in) tall and rather lanky. What should I do with it?.

Sue Martin (via email)

A Apart from its lankiness, you have a fine 'cordon' tomato plant that will continue to lengthen and crop well.

Rather than remove its growing tip, which will reduce its upward growth and reduce its cropping ability, feed it twice-weekly with a liquid tomato feed – there are many brands of high-potash (potassium) formulations – position it in good light and use a cane to support it to a height of 1.5m (5ft).

Alternatively, tie a length of strong



Above: Water and food should encourage a good crop of fruits

string around a peg inserted at the base of the stem and twist it carefully around the upper part of the plant and tie it to an overhead support.

Provided you water regularly, keeping the root area damp, and continue feeding while fruits are forming, you will enjoy a weighty crop.

Quick questions & answers



Amelanchier varieties provide colour and interest from spring until autumn

What is this tree please?

Q Please can you name this tree? It blooms in April with small white flowers. Hope you can help.

Doreen Rudd (via email)

A Lucky you! Your shrub/tree is an amelanchier, commonly known as June berry, serviceberry or snowy mespilus.

A native of North America, Europe and Asia, its enjoyable display of white blossom is a fetching focus in spring. There are many species, but that which most of us grow is *A. lamarckii* which, in common with other kinds, treats you to leaves which open silky and coppery red and turn scarlet before falling in autumn.

Pinch out for a punchy display

Q How can I transform my leggy seedlings into bushy beauties with lots of flowers?

Simon Clarke, Birmingham

A If you simply pinch out the growing tips, they will be encouraged to bush out.

Bushy plants develop more stems that can hold more flowers as they grow.

Once they are planted out, don't forget to deadhead when flowers

fade, and feed weekly with a liquid tomato fertiliser that contains lots of potassium for robust blooms.



Left: Pinching out seedlings encourages bushy growth



Ask JOHN NEGUS

John is a gardening legend and here to answer your lovely questions

How to keep hydrangeas healthy

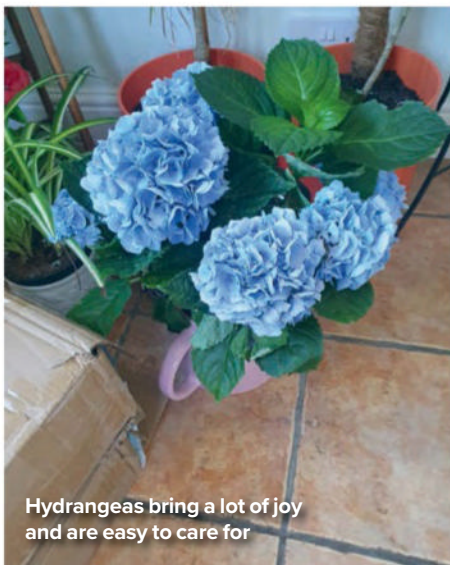
They will thrive in a sunny spot with regular watering

Q I have been given a beautiful hydrangea for Mother's Day. I have always avoided them as they seem complicated to grow. Could you advise me on its care please.

Mrs G. Barham (via email)

A What a lovely Mother's Day gift! I suggest that you grow your hydrangea in full sun or light shade. After taking out a generous planting hole, fill it with water. When it has drained away, set your plant, which you have also watered, in position at the same depth that it was in its pot. Finish by mulching the root area, avoiding stems, with a 7cm (3in) layer of moisture-conserving composted manure.

Hydrangeas are easy enough if you



Hydrangeas bring a lot of joy and are easy to care for

keep them watered in long, dry spells. As yours has blue flowers, the best way to retain this colour if your soil is not acid, is to feed them with a low phosphorus, high-potassium fertiliser such as Vitax or Westland Hydrangea Colourant.

Add it to the soil in spring or to a watering can when you are giving your charge a drink.

Alternatively, if you are planting in a patio pot, use ericaceous compost.

Reliable markers for plant labels

Q Renewing labels is one of my tasks but, regrettably, I have lost identities because they tend to fade. I do not have a favourite as I have never found a reliable marker so, when I need to replace a marker, I buy what is available on the high street. Can you recommend a good brand?

David J Hilton (via email)

A I understand how frustrated you must feel when you've labelled a special plant and found that rain has erased the name.

Pleasingly, the following ink brands have a good reputation for being weatherproof and should please you: Elixir Garden Marker Pen, Supagarden

Garden Marker and Staedtler Garden Marker Pen.

Remember, ensure that the label is dry before you write on it, and allow the ink to 'set' before you expose it to the weather. Here's to a set of labels that won't fade.



Above: 'Lost' plant identities can be very frustrating

Quick questions & answers



Growlights are designed to help seedlings thrive

Will my growlight harm seedlings?

Q I am about to sow seeds of *Papaver* 'Colibri' and *Dianthus* 'Rainbow Loveliness'. Can I place them under my LED growlight bulb of 25w full spectrum or will it be too bright for them? Will it scorch their leaves?

Colin Salter (via email)

A I am delighted that you are about to sow seeds of *Papaver* 'Colibri', a variety of Iceland poppy, and *Dianthus* 'Rainbow Loveliness'. What a display you'll have.

Pleasingly, if you germinate them beneath a 25watt LED Growlight bulb, which emits much less heat than an incandescent 25watt bulb, your charges will benefit from the extra light and won't scorch.

Why do ladybirds love our acer?

A Our green leaved acer, which is just coming into leaf, is covered in ladybirds. Is there something that makes this tree particularly attractive to them?

Christine Woolf (via email)

A I suspect that aphids (greenfly or blackfly) have infested the acer and are attracting predatory ladybird beetles and their larvae, which are commonly called crocodiles.

Both adults and infants feast on these tiny sap-sucking pests which can debilitate the foliage, so please don't use insecticides to eradicate them. Otherwise, you will kill the ladybirds.



Left: Ladybird larvae are great devourers of aphids

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Your LETTERS TO KIM



Your lovely letters, emails and social media posts continue to flow in beautifully. Every message, poem, idea and comment matters. Please keep them coming. We will send out a thank you gift for every item published in the magazine as soon as we can so do please send your address and contact details when you get in touch.

Poetry corner special

The trials of weeding

Weeding the garden is a tiresome chore. The roots seem to get longer each year making it harder to pull them out
I made up the little rhyme about my constant battle with the weeds

EACH SUNDAY I AM UP AT DAWN
TO PULL THE WEEDS OUT FROM THE LAWN
I'M SURE ONE MUTTERED AS I PASSED, AND STOPPED TO
TUG ONE FROM THE GRASS.
"AUSTRALIA! THAT'S THE COUNTRY JO
WHERE ALL US WEEDS TO START TO GROW"

Jo Fletcher, Devon

An inspiring community garden

Hello Kim

I thought you might be interested to hear about our community gardening group.

Knowing how beneficial green spaces around hospitals are for the mental health of patients and staff we work in partnership with the management of our local hospital here in North Wales, Wrexham Maelor Hospital, to create beautiful gardens around the hospital. If any of your readers would like to get involved by either volunteering with us or by donating plants for the gardens they can contact us through our website www.wrexhamcommunitygardeners.org

Ruth Tesdale

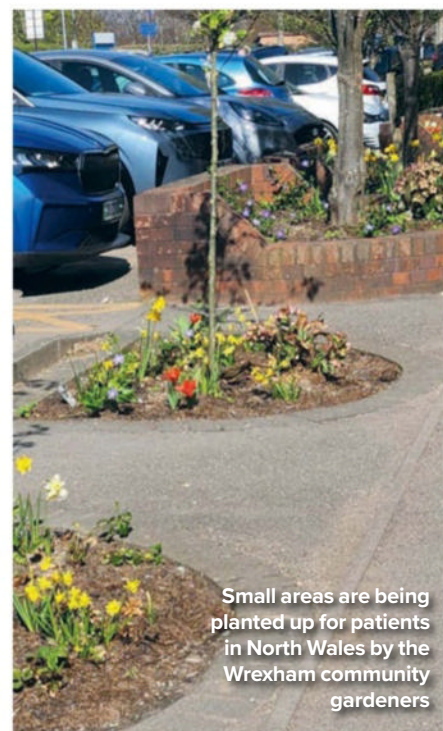
Kim says; thank you for writing in Ruth, that's so lovely to see the joyful planting around the hospital.

Making the most of life

In this Life,

You pass this way through life so do your very best,
in this crazy world we live in with so much hatred and unrest.
To work and play and enjoy each hour of the day,
fulfil your dreams and hopes in your own 'special' way.
Life is such a very short ride on a magical carousel,
time pass by so very quickly as we all know so well;
With disappointments and heartaches, sadness and tears,
but also much love and laughter, and success through the years.
There's no 'second bite of the cherry' I hear people say,
so wear a smile and be happy, show kindness to others
to enlighten their day.

Margaret Bevan, Abergavenny



Small areas are being planted up for patients in North Wales by the Wrexham community gardeners

COMPETITION TIME!

Win one of 10 Westland summer gardening bundles worth over £100 each!



Westland has partnered with *Amateur Gardening* to give **10 lucky winners** the chance to win an incredible gardening bundle, packed with everything you need to keep your garden looking its best this summer.

This fantastic prize includes the innovative **Boost Growing System**, designed to help you achieve the very best container and basket displays in just three simple steps:

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- 3. **Boost All Purpose Liquid Feed** – Use to nourish your plants and enjoy up to 4x more blooms* for a spectacular, long-lasting display.

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- 1 month
- 3 months
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Terms & Conditions: Entries close at 23:59 on 13/06/2025. The draw is final, and no correspondence will be entered into. Entry is free and open to UK residents aged 18 and over. Only one entry per person is permitted; bulk entries will not be accepted. There is no cash alternative, and the prize is non-transferable. In the event of loss or damage to the prize or product during delivery, Kelsey Media will provide reasonable assistance in resolving the issue. However, replacements may not always be available, and no financial compensation will be provided by Kelsey Media or their affiliates. We reserve the right to cancel the competition if circumstances beyond our control arise. By participating, you agree to comply with all rules. Upon winning, your surname and county may be disclosed. You will automatically receive the Amateur Gardening newsletter, with the option to unsubscribe at any time using the provided link. Occasionally, we may send you related information from other Kelsey titles or partners, which you can also opt out of at any time. Lastly, Westland Horticulture will have access to the entry data for marketing purposes.

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Your contribution is such an important part of this magazine for the future.

AG is for you the people, for gardeners and proud custodians of gardens everywhere, so please do write in. We will send a gift for each letter, poem and musing published.

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PLANT WATCH

With **Michael Perry**

Exciting recommendations from our expert plantsman



Hydrangea macrophylla
Eclipse® has dramatic dark foliage and seductive cranberry-coloured flowers

Sensational new generation shrubs

Michael reveals his pick of the plants perfect for filling a space with colour and interest

Let's face it, shrubs used to have a bad rep. They were seen as uninspiring, you might even say a bit boring. They were purchased to 'fill a gap', and intended to be almost invisible, simply used to bulk out the border.

Well, all that has changed with modern breeding, and shrubs have had what we might call a 'glow up'! Not only is there myriad brightly coloured foliage, but there's also cracking autumn colour, winter interest... the list goes on.

These are not just glossy on the outside either, they are also super-hardworking, creating the ideal backdrop to your dream garden.

You might have seen a few shrubs in bright purple pots in your garden centre recently too. They're from the leading plant brand First Editions®, who are about to take Europe by storm with a whole host of shrub introductions.

And, of course, I am bringing you that news here first.. Enjoy!

First Editions® *Hydrangea macrophylla* Eclipse®

Black-leaved plants do exist, just look at this!

Eclipse® is the hydrangea everyone's

been talking about at all the top trade shows during 2024. It is a truly dark-leaf mophead hydrangea, holding that colour right through the seasons, and even in warmer weather when most other foliage would turn green.

But, as if that wasn't enough, the flowerheads, oh wow! Either cranberry or amethyst-coloured, depending on your soil (remember, alkaline gives a pink tone, while acid gives a blue tone) - they are simply divine!



First Editions® *Vitex* Queen Bee® Chastetree

If you haven't heard of *Vitex agnus-castus*, you will soon, as this is a real plant with a future.

Plants can simultaneously cope with hot, cold and dry conditions, which means Queen Bee® Chastetree is perfectly tailored to our changeable English weather.

With the look of a buddleia, it fills borders fast and bursts into denim-blue blooms that pollinators love. Reaching a height and width of 1.8m (6ft), it's a striking, low-maintenance choice for modern gardens.

Fragrant, beautiful, and buzzing with life, Queen Bee is ready to rule your landscape.



First Editions® *Diervilla* Cool Splash®

Shady corners aren't just for shades of green, you can also switch on the lights with this glorious

bush honeysuckle.

Cool Splash® is a type of *Diervilla sessilifolia*, a family of shrubs which are relatively new to gardens. But, I'm so glad they discovered them, as they grow well in any soil and flower profusely, with nectar-rich flowers for the bees.

A mounding, what I call 'self-shaping' plant, which reaches around 60cm (2ft) tall, it might also look rather dashing in a patio container - give it a go!



First Editions® *Hydrangea paniculata* Little Hottie®

Little Hottie® may be petite, but she's sure packed with presence.

Standing at only 90cm (3ft) tall, she shows off those creamy-white blooms, which remarkably don't burn in the summer sun. As autumn arrives, her flowerheads shift through a carnival of pinks and rustic reds.

Perfect for borders, beds or containers, she's sun-loving, low-maintenance, and effortlessly elegant, a true garden gem ready to steal the spotlight while taking up a fraction of the space of usual hydrangeas.



First Editions® *Cephalanthus* Fiber Optics

Now here's something completely different!

Introducing Fiber Optics - a truly unique variety of cephalanthus. Check out those Sputnik-like flowerheads that are quite unlike anything else.

Butterflies love the nectar-filled flowers. A somewhat freeform shrub with an elegant habit, it's ideal for planting into areas prone to occasional flooding as it enjoys a moist soil.

Find out more: www.firsteditionsplants.eu
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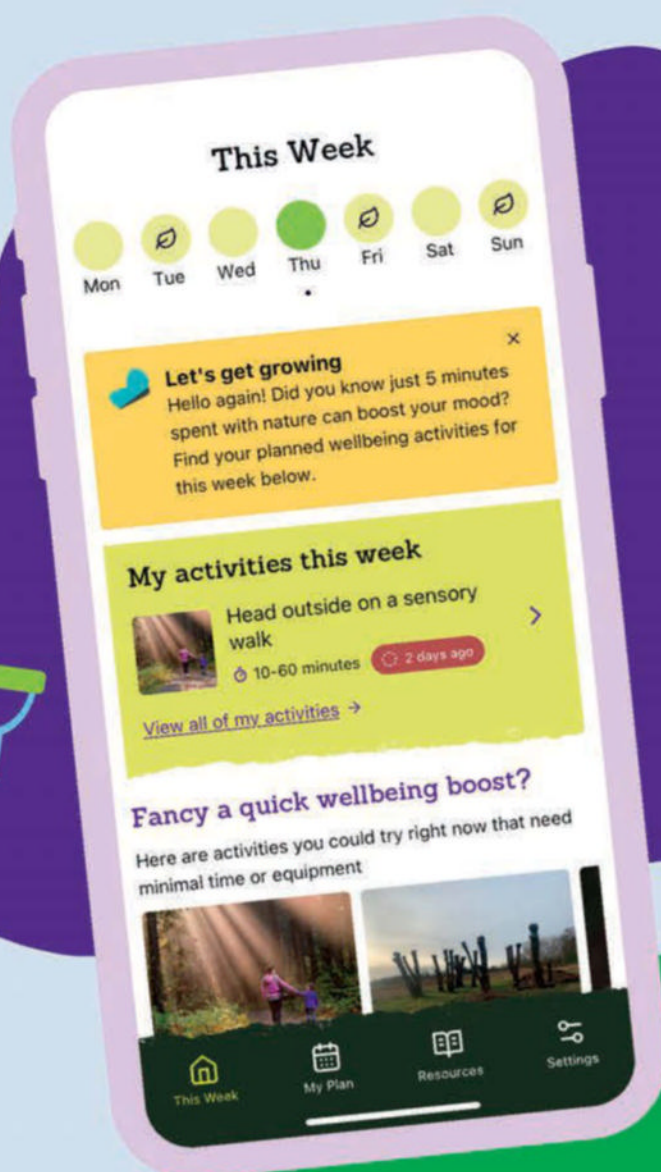
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TOBY'S TALKING CONTAINER GARDENING TIPS



Agapanthus may grow well in pots for longer but they will need some attention over time, Toby explains what to do

How to boost results when re-potting and planting out

Toby gives his European blue palm a new home and explains the easiest way to keep container plants happy

The longest-lived pot plant in the world is a giant cycad that's been thriving at Kew Gardens for an incredible 240 years. During its potted history, epoch-defining inventions - the internal combustion engine, computer and... onesie - have changed the world.

And through it all, generations of caring gardeners have tended to its needs, terrified that they'd be the one to overwater and kill it.



The incredibly long-lived cycad at Kew Gardens



Above: We tend to grow mint in pots to keep it contained but it needs division and fresh compost every year ideally to grow on. Inset: The roots of mint spread far and wide

That old pot plant has been on my mind because after many years of service, I've decided to plant my oldest container-grown plant, a European blue palm, in the soil. It's been in its half-barrel for 10 years - a mere blink in comparison to the Kew cycad, but long enough for it to start to display signs that it was ready for a move.

All plants in containers have a life limited by the confines of their pot and the hungrier they are and quicker they grow, the shorter that life will be.

The case of the shorter-lived pot herb

Topping the live-fast-die-young scale are plants that in nature grow in rich soils. Mint is a good example, harking as it does from riversides where it roots in the nutrient-rich drier soil at the surface and spreads far and wide to absorb its meals on the go. The roots are shallow because it likes to keep its feet above the wet and it grows quickly



Above: Mediterranean plants like lavender can thrive for longer in container soil

to keep pace with neighbouring wetland herbs that also have growth rates akin to a pantomime beanstalk.

A pot is still the recommended way of stopping mint spreading but the plants demand regular division and repotting into fresh compost to survive. I do mine every

year, and even in this short time the roots have found their way to the rim where if left they'd circle to exhaustion.

Longer-lived pot plants

Less demanding and longer-lived are plants from drier

Mediterranean climes and from soils that are low in organic matter. Palms, silver-leaved herbs like lavender, artemisia and fleshy agapanthus will all survive on meagre diets and are blessed with forgiving natures so are slow to sulk if a watering is missed.

But even these toughies need occasional rejuvenation. I was chatting to a friend who kept an agapanthus in the same pot for 15 years. You might know the old trope that agapanthus need pot-bound roots to flower. I'm not one to get in the way of a good story but this isn't strictly true and what's undeniable is that my friend's display of blue flowers was brilliant until suddenly it wasn't, when the plant nearly died.

Time for a new home for the European blue palm

I hauled the flagging agapanthus from its pot and it was easy to see why it had lost its mojo as the spaghetti of roots had filled every millimetre of container space and, like a boa constrictor, had squeezed all the air, water and compost from the rootball. It wasn't so much root bound as ruined by its own roots.

My blue palm isn't at that stage but it has a look about it that you might notice on a friend's dusty-leaved house plants where familiarity has bred contempt. It looks... bored.

Its meh-ness is apparent in the leaves that have lost their brio and aren't produced in the same abundance that they once were. It's not that it looks bad, it just doesn't look as good as it should.

If I didn't have border space to re-home it, I'd use the same trick as I did on my friend's agapanthus, (see the next page) though I also used an old woodsaw to divide it into three.

As it was I rolled it, while still in the barrel near to where I wanted it and dug a hole.

How to save effort planting on

When digging large planting holes, mark a circle on the ground where they're to go and always start in the middle and work outwards. It seems counterintuitive but if you start on the edge you'll step on the markings and the hole's location will drift. Also, once the middle is out to the required



It's time for Toby's blue palm to be planted on and out



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← A plant that needs desperately potting on can also damage its container over time as its roots try to break free

depth, if you work backwards, slicing and tipping the sides into the central hole and shovelling out, it's so much easier than working towards the middle, which is harder as you have to slice and lift out as you go.

Another back-saver is to roll the rootball or slide it on a sack, as opposed to lifting it to where it's wanted, and then slide it down a plank and into its hole letting gravity do the work.

Now to decide what to buy and put in the old container. I can feel a shopping trip coming on!

How to re-boot a pot plant without potting on

You can only pot-on a patio plant so many times before it becomes too big to handle or you run out of a next size up pot. But when that happens all is not lost.

Tip the pot on its side - put a sheet of cardboard below to protect the patio and container if necessary - and gently lift the main stems up and down until the rootball wiggles free. Once out of the pot, use an

old wood saw to chop off the bottom fifth of the rootball and then fettle around the edge and top with a hand trowel to tease an inch of the old compost away.



Toby explains how to successfully dig a hole for your plant

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GARDEN MUSINGS

with **Bob Flowerdew**, long-standing AG contributor, broadcaster and all-round expert.

How to have your pick of the peppers and chillies

For a hot pot or a sweet treat, **Bob** explains how there's a capsicum to suit your taste

Something missing from most older textbooks are capsicum peppers, both sweet and chilli. Gardeners, even those with a greenhouse, tended to neglect these until recently, but now we're overwhelmed by a multitude of mouth-searingly hot, hot, hot peppers.

These have introduced many garden-less city dwellers to gardening as they are often successful grown on a sunny windowsill.

Hot peppers and sweet peppers are similar, as both require more warmth than tomatoes so are much happier in a cold frame or greenhouse than outdoors.

But on a sunny patio, chillies crop marginally better than sweet, probably because hot are generally smaller, more compact plants with smaller fruits so they can sit on tables that are warmer than down on the ground where the bulkier sweet sorts have space to live.

Plus, small hot fruits can ripen sooner (if their skin starts to turn blackish they're wind chilled and need more shelter) whereas relatively large sweet peppers take more resources and so are slower to crop.



Above: If you have haven't sown capsicum seed yet, consider buying young plants



Bob reveals how to get more from your chilli plants and peppers

It makes sense to buy in plants

Under cover though, sweet peppers crop really well and are an excellent choice as fruits are more expensive to buy than, say, tomatoes. Chilli peppers have even more value - offer surplus at your gate at 50p apiece or 3 for £1, which is an astronomical price per kilo!

Both can be started from seed in early April, it's too late now for a full crop, but as you likely only want a few plants it's a similar cost to buy some plug plants in.

Although not difficult to grow, peppers are slow to germinate and grow away compared with other tender crops, so purchasing small plants right now makes considerable sense.

Keep these warm, potting up into litre pots for compact hot sorts, generous tubs for larger-growing varieties and all sweet ones. The latter will also need canes to support their heavier load, the hot seldom do. Both peppers need rich, well-drained compost and regular watering and feeding, though must never get waterlogged.

One unusual tip - peppers like it warm but their roots do not like it hot, so when plants are standing in full sun, shade their pots, painting them white or wrapping them with aluminium foil.

Treat your chillies as perennials

Pollination is seldom needed, and fortunately neither hot nor sweet peppers are much bothered by pests or diseases, other than the usual aphids and molluscs; be especially careful with ripening sweet peppers as hungry critters can burrow through a small hole, ruining the fruit inside.

Although sweet pepper varieties ripen red, yellow or purple, most can be eaten still green, and picking some early encourages more to grow. They can also be picked as soon as they start to colour then finished on a warm windowsill. Hot peppers need to be ripe for most uses, but again prompt picking encourages more to set.

Sweet peppers can be chopped and frozen for winter use and chillies are a doddle to dry. If you have a warm bright spot indoors you may get some plants through winter holding a late crop and then for an earlier crop next year.

Sweet are predominantly annual so often lost whereas chillies are basically perennial and often succeed grown on, so do have a go.

You can find out more about Bob via his website www.bobflowerdew.com and what's happening in his garden via Twitter (now X) [@FlowerdewBob](https://twitter.com/FlowerdewBob)

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